

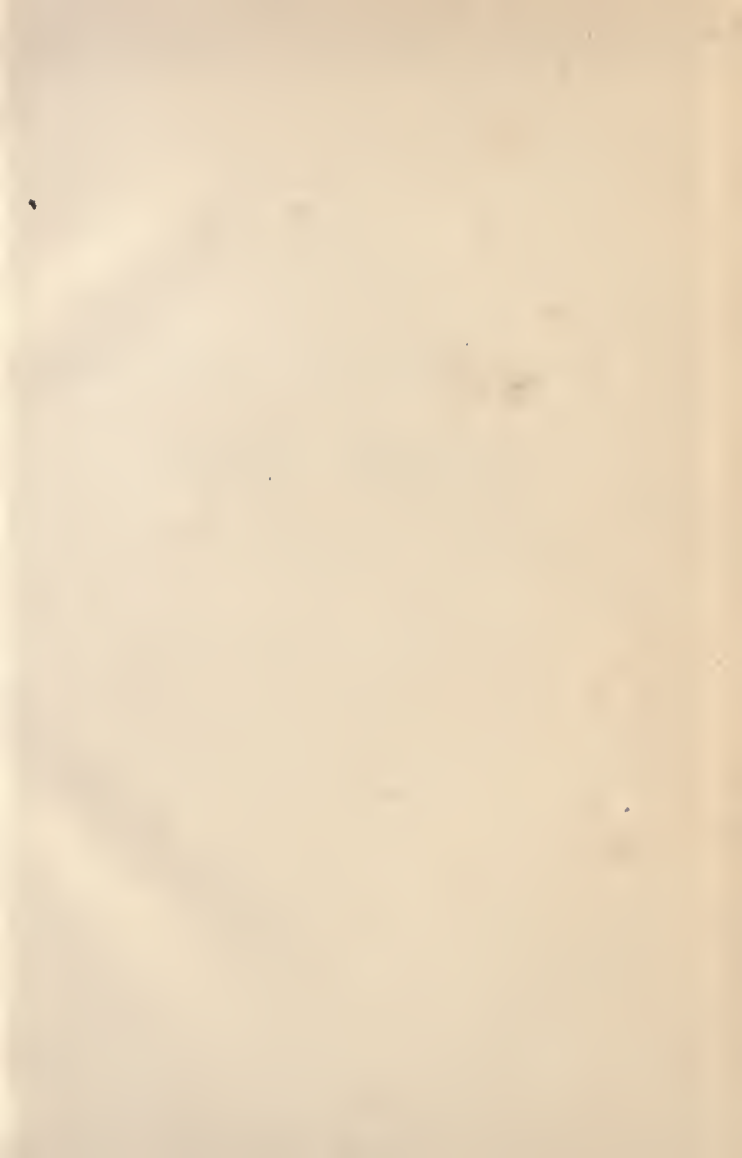
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VOL. 3716.

HIS FORTUNATE GRACE, Etc..

BY
GERTRUDE ATHERTON.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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HIS FORTUNATE GRACE

ETC.

BY

Franklin (Horn)

GERTRUDE A¹¹¹THERTON

AUTHOR OF "AMERICAN WIVES AND ENGLISH HUSBANDS,"

"A DAUGHTER OF THE VINE," ETC.

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HIS FORTUNATE GRACE.

TO
ALEECE VAN BERGEN.

HIS FORTUNATE GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

"ARE you quite sure?" Mr. Forbes laid down his newspaper, and looked with slightly extended mouth at his daughter who leaned forward in an attitude of suppressed energy, her hands clasped on the edge of the breakfast-table. The heiress of many millions was not handsome: her features were large and her complexion dull; but she had the carriage and "air" of the New York girl of fashion, and wore a French morning-toilette which would have ameliorated a Gorgon.

"Quite sure, papa."

"I suppose you have studied the question exhaustively."

"Oh, yes, indeed. I have read Karl Marx and Henry George and a lot of others. I suppose you have not forgotten that I belong to a club of girls who aspire to be something more than fashionable butterflies, and that we read together?"

"And you are also positive that you wish me to

divide my fortune with my fellow-men, and deprive you of the pleasant position of heiress?"

"Perfectly positive," firmly. "It is terrible, terrible to think of the starving thousands. I feel it my duty to tell you, papa, that if you do not do this yourself, I shall—when—when—but I cannot even think of that."

"No; don't worry about it. I'm good for twenty or thirty years yet——"

"You are the handsomest and most distinguished-looking man in New York."

"Thanks. To proceed: I should say that you are likely to be several things meanwhile. I don't know that I shall even take the trouble to alter my will. Still, I may—that is unless you convert me. And you are also convinced that women should have the vote?"

"Yes! Yes! Indeed I am. I know all the arguments for and against. I've heard and read everything. You see, if we get the vote we can bring Socialism about quite easily."

"Without the slightest difficulty, I should say, considering the homogeneity of the feminine mind."

"You darling sarcastic thing. But can't you see what weight such women as we are interesting in the cause *must* have? We have carefully excluded the *nouveau riche*; only the very oldest and most notable names will be on our petition when we get it up."

"Oh, you are going to get up a petition? Well, let that pass for the present. Suppose you fall in love and want to marry?"

"I shall tell him everything. What I intend to

make of my life—do with what wealth I have at my disposal. If he does not sympathise with me and agree to my plans, he must go. A woman's chief end is not matrimony."

"I need not ask if you have ever been in love?"

"Oh, of course, I want to be, dreadfully. All women do—even we advanced women—now, papa! I don't love you quite so well when you smile like that. I am twenty-one, and that is quite old for a girl who has been highly educated, has travelled, and been out two years. I have a right to call myself advanced, because I have gone deliberately into the race, and have read up a great deal, even if I have as yet accomplished nothing. Exactly how much are you worth, papa?"

"Broadly speaking, about thirty millions. As a great deal of that is in railroad and other stock, I am liable to be worth much less any day; much is also in land, which is worth only what it will bring. Still, I should say that I am reasonably sure of a fair amount."

"It is terrible, papa! All that land! Do give some of it at least to the poor dear people—I assure you we feel that we have taken them under our wing, and have grown quite sentimental over them. Mr. George would tell you what to do, at once. That man's very baggy knees fascinate me: he is so magnificently in earnest. When he scolded us all for being rich, the other day at the meeting, I loved him."

"It is a great relief to me that George is a married man. Well, my dear, your allowance is ten thousand dollars a year. Do what you please with it, and come to me if your fads and whims demand more. God forbid that I should stand in the way of any woman's

happiness. By-the-bye, what does your mother think of this business?"

"She is *most* unsympathetic."

"So I should imagine," said Mr. Forbes, drily. "Your mother is the cleverest woman I know."

CHAPTER II.

AFTER luncheon, Miss Forbes hied herself to a drawing-room meeting in behalf of Socialism. Despite the fact that she had elected the *rôle* of mental muscularity, she gave studious application to her attire: her position and all that pertained to it were her enduring religion; the interests of the flashing seasons were unconsciously patronised rather than assimilated. As she walked up the Avenue toward the house of her friend, Mrs. Latimer Burr, she looked like a well-grown lad masquerading in a very smart outfit of brown tweed, so erect and soldierly was her carriage, so independent her little stride. A bunch of violets was pinned to her muff, another at her throat, and she wore a severe little toque instead of the picture-hat she usually affected.

She smiled as she swung along, and one or two women looked back at her and sighed. She was quite happy. She had never known an ungratified wish; she was spoken of in the newspaper as one of the few intellectual young women in New York society; and now she had a really serious object in life. She felt little spasms of gratification that she had been born to set the world to rights—she and a few others: she felt that she was not selfish, for she grudged no one a share in the honours.

When she reached Mrs. Burr's house, high on the Avenue, and overlooking the naked trees and the glittering white of the Park, she found that other toilettes had taken less time than hers: several of her friends complimented the occasion with a punctuality which she commended without envy.

The large drawing-room, which was to be the scene of operations, was a marvellous combination of every pale colour known to nature and art, and looked expectant of white-wigged dames, sparkling with satin and diamonds, tripping the mazes of the minuet with gentlemen as courtly as their dress was rich and colourous. But only a half-dozen extremely smart young women of the hoary Nineteenth Century sat in a group, talking as fast as seals on a rock; and the slim little hostess was compactly gowned in pearl-grey cloth, her sleek head dressed in the fashion of the moment.

She came forward, a lorgnette held close to her eyes. "How dear of you, Augusta, to be so prompt!" she said, kissing her lightly. "Dear me! I wish I could be as frightfully in earnest as the rest of you, but for the life of me I can't help feeling that it's all a jolly good lark—perhaps that's the effect of my ex-sister-in-law, Patience Sparhawk, who says we are only playing at being alive. But we can't all have seventeen different experiences before we are twenty-four, including a sojourn in Murders' Row, and a frantic love affair with one's own husband——"

"Tell me, Hal, what is a woman like who has been through all that?" interrupted Augusta, her ears pricking with girlish curiosity. "Is she eccentric? Does she look old—or something?"

"She's not much like us," said Mrs. Burr, briefly. "You'll meet her in time; it's odd you never happened to, even if you weren't out. Of course she can't go out for awhile yet; it would hardly be good taste, even if she wanted to."

"How interestingly dreadful to have had such a thing in the family. But I should think she would be just the one to take life seriously."

"Oh, she does; that's the reason she doesn't waste any time. Here is someone else. Who is it?—oh, Mary Gallatin."

Augusta joined the group.

"Where is Mable Creighton?" demanded one of the girls. "I thought she was coming with you."

"Haven't you heard?" Miss Forbes, with an air of elaborate indifference, drew her eyelids together as if to focus a half-dozen women that were entering. "The Duke of Bosworth arrives to-day, and she has stayed at home to receive him."

"Augusta! What do you mean? *What* Duke of Bosworth?"

"There is only one duke of the same name at a time, my dear. This is the Duke of Bosworth of Aire Castle—and I suppose a half-dozen others—of the West Riding, of the district of Craven, of the County of Yorkshire, England. He has five other titles, I believe; and enjoys the honour of the friendship of Fletcher Cuyler."

"Well!"

"Mabel met him abroad, and got to know him quite well; and when he wrote her that he should arrive to-

day, she thought it only hospitable to stay at home and receive him."

"Are they engaged? Augusta, *do* be an angel."

"I am sure I have not the slightest idea whether they are engaged or not. Mabel always has a flirtation on with somebody."

"What is he like? How perfectly funny! How quiet she has kept him. Is he good-looking—or—well, just like some of the others?"

"Mabel has merely mentioned him to me, and I have not seen his photograph."

"She'd make a lovely bride; and Mrs. Creighton has such exquisite taste—St. Thomas' would be a dream. I suppose he'll wear a grey suit with the trousers turned up and a pink shirt. I do hope he won't walk up the Avenue with her with a big black cigar in his mouth."

"Is that what we came here to talk about?" asked Miss Forbes, severely. "What difference does it make what a foreign titled thing looks like? We are here to discuss a question which will one day exterminate the entire order."

"True," exclaimed a dark-haired distinguished-looking girl who was mainly responsible for the intellectual reputation of her set, albeit not exempt from the witchery of fads. "We must stop gossiping and attend to business. Do you know that I am expected to speak? How am I to collect my thoughts?"

"You have so many, Alex," said Miss Forbes, admiringly, "that it wouldn't matter if a few got loose. Have you prepared your speech? I have mine by heart."

"I have thought it out. I don't think I shall be frightened; it is really such a very serious matter."

"Have you spoken to your father?"

"Oh, we've talked it over, but I can't say that he agrees with us."

Augusta laughed consciously. "There are probably some points of similarity in our experiences. But we must be firm."

Some thirty women, gowned with fashionable simplicity, had arrived, and were seated in a large double semi-circle. They looked alert and serious. Mrs. Burr drifted aimlessly about for a moment, then paused before a table and tapped it smartly with her lorgnette.

"I suppose we may as well begin," she said. "I believe we are going to discuss to-day the—a—the advisability of women having the vote—franchise. Also Socialism. Miss Maitland, who has thoroughly digested both subjects, and many more, has kindly consented to speak; and Dr. Broadhead is coming in later to give us one of his good scoldings. Alexandra, will you open the ball?"

"Hal, you are incorrigible," exclaimed Miss Maitland, drawing her dark brows together. "At least you might pretend to be in earnest. We think it very good of you to lend us your house, and we are delighted that you managed Dr. Broadhead so cleverly, but we don't wish to be flouted, for we, at least, are in earnest."

"Alexis, if you scold me, I shall cry. And I'll now be serious—I swear it. You know I admire you to death. Your French poetry is adorable; you have more ideas for decorating than any professional in New York, and you fence like a real Amazon. I am simply dying to hear you make a speech; but first let me see if Latimer is hiding anywhere."

She went out into the hall and returned in a moment. "It would be just like Latimer to get Fletcher Cuyler and listen, and then guy us. Now, Alexandra, proceed," and she seated herself, and applied her lorgnette to her bright quizzical eyes.

Miss Maitland, somewhat embarrassed by her introduction, stepped to the middle of the room and faced her audience. She gave a quick sidelong glance at her skirts. They stood out like a yacht under full sail. She was a fine looking girl, far above woman's height, with dignified features, a bright happy expression, and a soft colour. She was a trifle nervous, and opened her jacket to gain time, throwing it back.

"That's a Paquin blouse," whispered a girl confidently to Augusta.

"Sh-h!" said Miss Forbes severely.

Miss Maitland showed no further symptom of nervousness. She clasped her hands lightly and did not make a gesture nor shift her position during her speech. Her repose was very impressive.

"I think we should vote," she said decidedly. "It will not be agreeable in many respects, and will heavily increase our responsibilities, but the reasons for far outweigh those against. A good many of us have money in our own names. We all have large allowances. Some day we may have the terrible responsibility of great wealth. The income-tax is in danger of being defeated. If we get the vote, we may do much toward making it a law, and it is a move in the right direction towards Socialism. Our next must be towards persuading the Government to take the railroads. It is shocking that the actual costs of transit should be so small,

the charges so exorbitant and the profits so enormous. I feel this so oppressively that every time I make a long journey by rail, I give the equivalent of my fare to the poor at once. It is a horrifying thing that we on this narrow island of New York city should live like hot-house plants in the midst of a malarious swamp: that almost at our back doors the poor are living, whole families in one room, and on one meal a day. My father gives me many thousands a year for charity, but charity is not the solution of the problem. There must be a redistribution of wealth. Of course I have no desire to come down to poverty; I am physically unfit for it, as are all of us. We should have sufficient left to insure our comfort; but any woman with brain can get along without the more extravagant luxuries. It is time that we did something to justify our existence, and if the law required that we worked two or three hours a day instead of leading the idle life of pleasure that we do——”

“We are ornamental; that is something,” exclaimed a remarkably pretty woman. “I am sure the people outside love to read about and look at us. Society gossip is not written for *us*.”

Miss Maitland smiled. “You certainly are ornamental, Mary,” she said; “but fancy how much more interesting you would be if you were useful as well.”

“I’d lose my good looks.”

“Well, you can’t keep them for ever. You should cultivate a substitute meanwhile, and then you never need be driven back into the ranks of *passée*, disappointed women. Faded beauties are a bore to everybody.”

"I refuse to contemplate such a prospect. Alex, you are getting to be a horrid rude advanced New Woman."

Mrs. Burr clapped her hands. "How delightful!" she cried, "I didn't know we were to have a debate."

"Now keep quiet, all of you," said Miss Maitland; "I have not finished. Mary Gallatin, don't you interrupt me again. Now that we understand this question so thoroughly, we must have more recruits. Of course, hundreds of women of the upper class are signing the petition asking for the extension of the franchise to our sex, but few of them are interested in Socialism. And if it is to be brought about, it must be by us. I have little faith in the rag-tag bob-tail element at present enlisted in that cause. They not only carry little weight with the more intelligent part of the community, but I have been assured that they would not fight—and they take it out in talk; that if ever there was a great upheaval, they would let the anarchists do the killing, and then step in, and try to get control later.

"Now, I thoroughly despise a coward; so do all women; and I have no faith in the propagandism of men that won't fight. What we must do is to enlist our men. They are luxurious now, and love all that pertains to wealth; but, as Wellington said once of the same class in England: 'The puppies can fight!' Not that our men are puppies—don't misunderstand me—but you know what I mean. They would only seem so to a man who had spent his life in the saddle.

"It has been said that the Civil War took our best blood, and that that is the reason we have no great men now; all the most gallant and high-minded and

ambitious were killed—although I don't forget that Mr. Forbes could be anything that he chose. I suppose he thinks that American statesmanship has fallen so low that he scorns to come out avowedly as the head of his party, and merely amuses himself pulling the wires. But I feel positive that if a tremendous crisis ever arose, it would be Mr. Forbes who would unravel the snarl. You can tell him that, Augusta, with my compliments.

“Now, I have come to the real point of what I have to say. It was first suggested to me by Helena Belmont when she was on here last, and it has taken a strong hold on my mind. We must awaken the soul in our men—that is what they lack. The germ is there, but it has not been developed; perhaps I should say that the soul of the American people rose to its full flower during the Civil War, and then withered in the reaction, and in the commercial atmosphere which has since fitted our nation closer than its own skin. Miss Belmont says that nothing will arouse the men but another war; that they will be nothing but a well-fed body with a mental annex until they once more have a ‘big atmosphere’ to expand in. But I don't wholly agree with her, and the thought of another such sacrifice is appalling. I believe that the higher qualities in man can be roused more surely by woman than by bloodshed, and that if we, the women of New York, the supposed orchids, butterflies, or whatever people choose to call us, whose luxury is the cynosure and envy of the continent, could be instrumental in giving back to the nation its lost spiritual quality—understand, please, that I do not use the word in its religious sense—it would be a far greater achievement than any

for which the so-called emancipated women are vociferating. The vote is a minor consideration. If we acquire the influence over men that we should, we shall not need it. And personally, I should dispense with it with great pleasure."

"Bravo! young lady," exclaimed a vibrating resonant voice, and a clerical man entered the room to the clapping of many hands. His eyes were keen and restless, his hair and beard black and silver, and there was a curious disconcerting bald spot on his chin. He looked ready to burst with energy.

"Thank you all very much, but don't clap any more, for I have only a few minutes to spare. How do you do, Mrs. Burr? Yes, that was a very good speech—I have been eavesdropping, you see. Feminine, but I am the last to quarrel with that. It is not necessary for a woman to be logical so long as her instincts are in the right direction. Well, I will say a few words to you; but they must be few as I am very hoarse: I have been speaking all day." He strode about as he talked, and occasionally smote his hands together. He was a very emphatic speaker, and, like all crusaders, somewhat theatrical.

"I agree with all that Miss Maitland has said to you—with the exception of her views on Socialism. I don't believe Socialism to be the solution of our loathsome municipal degradation nor of the universal social evil. But I have no time to go into that question to-day. The other part—that you must awaken the soul of the men of your class—I most heartily endorse. The gentlemen alone can save this country—snatch it from the hands of plebeians and thieves. In them alone lies

the hope of American regeneration. When I read of a strapping young man who has been educated at Harvard, or Yale, or Princeton, who is an expert boxer, fencer, whip, oarsman, yachtsman, addicted to all manly sport, in fact—when I read of such a man having tortoise-shell brushes with diamond monograms, diamond garter buckles, and thirty sets of silk pyjamas—never see their names in the paper except as ushers at weddings, or as having added some new trifle to their costly apartments, it makes me sick—sick! A war would rouse these young men, as Miss Maitland suggests; I haven't the slightest doubt that they would fight magnificently, and that those who survived would be serious and useful men for the rest of their lives. But we don't want war, and you must do the rousing. Make them vote—vote—nullify the thieving lying cormorants who are fattening on your country, and ruining it morally and financially, as well as making it the scorn and jest of Europe. And make them vote, not only this year, but every year for the rest of their lives, and on every possible question. It is to be hoped, indeed, that no war will come to awaken their manhood—we don't want to pay so hideous a price as that, and it is shocking that it has been found necessary to suggest it. But what we do want is a great moral war. Lash them into that, and see that they do not break ranks until they have honest men in the legislature, in Congress, and in every municipal office in the country. Now, I must be off," and waving a hasty adieu, he shot out.

"For my part," said Mrs. Burr, above the enthusiastic chorus, "I am delighted that he didn't uphold Socialism. I'll undertake the reformation of Latimer, although it

will probably give me wrinkles and turn me grey, but I won't have him giving up his 'boodle,' as they say out West; not I! not I!"

"Gally is hopeless," said that famous clubman's wife, with a sigh. "I shall have to work on someone else."

"It will be lots more interesting," murmured her neighbour.

"How shall we begin?" asked Mrs. Burr, wrinkling her smooth brow. "Put them on gruel and hot water for awhile? I am sure they are hopeless so long as they eat and drink so much."

"I suppose all we girls will have to marry," remarked one of them.

"Well, you would, anyhow," said Mrs. Burr, consolingly.

"I shall not marry until I find the right man," said Augusta firmly, "not if I die an old maid. But father would be a splendid convert, and his name would carry great weight."

"You mean for Socialism," replied her hostess. "No man does his political duty more religiously than Mr. Forbes. But let us send Socialism to—ahem—and just work at the other thing. I am dying to see how Latimer will take it."

"Never!" exclaimed Augusta, and was echoed loyally. "We must not lose sight of that. I don't at all agree with Dr. Broadhead on that point. I have fully made up my mind to bring papa round."

"But you are at a disadvantage, darling," said Mrs. Burr, drily; "your beautiful mamma thinks we are all a pack of idiots, and your father has a great respect

for her opinion, to say nothing of being more or less *épris*."

"I shall convert her too," said Augusta sturdily.

Mrs. Burr laughed outright. "I can just see Mrs. Forbes posing as a prophet of Socialism. Well, let us eat. Alexis, you must be limp all the way down, and your thinker must be fairly staggering. I will pour you a stiff cup of tea and put some rum in it."

Augusta rose. "I must go, Hal," she said. "I have a speech to make myself in the slums, you know. Aren't you coming?"

"I? God forbid! But do take something before you go. It may save you from stage-fright."

"I haven't a minute. I must be there in twenty. Who is coming with me?"

Eight or ten of the company rose and hurried out with her; the rest gathered about the tea-table and relieved their mental tension in amicable discussion of the lighter matters of the day.

CHAPTER III.

A FOOTMAN had taken the Duke of Bosworth's cards up to Miss Mabel Creighton and her mother. The young man had arrived but an hour before and still wore his travelling gear, but had been given to understand that an English peer was welcome in a New York drawing-room on any terms. The drawing-room in which he awaited the American maiden who had taken his attenuated fancy was large and sumptuous and very expensive. There were tables of ormolu, and cabinets of tortoise-shell containing collections of cameos, fans and miniatures, a *lapis lazuli* clock three feet high, and a piano inlaid with twenty-seven different woods. The walls were frescoed by a famous hand, and there were lamps and candle-brackets and various articles of decoration which must have been picked up in extensive travels.

The Duke noted everything with his slow listless gaze. He sat forward on the edge of his chair, his chin pressed to the head of his stick. He was a small delicately-built man, of thirty or more. His shoulders had rounded slightly. His cheeks and lower lip were beginning to droop. The pale blue eyes were dim, the lids red. He was a debauchee, but "a good sort," and men liked him.

He did not move during the quarter of an hour he

was kept waiting, but when the *portière* was pushed aside he rose quickly, and went forward with much grace and charm of manner. The girl who entered was a dainty blonde fluffy creature, and looked like a bit of fragile china in the palatial room.

"How sweet of you to come so soon," she said, with frank pleasure. "I did not expect you for an hour yet. Mamma will be down presently. She is quite too awfully anxious to meet you."

The Duke resumed his seat and leaned back this time, regarding Miss Creighton through half-closed eyes. His expression was much the same as when he had inventoried the room.

"I came to America to see you," he said.

The colour flashed to her hair, but she smiled gracefully. "How funny! Just as if you had run over to pay me an afternoon call. Did the trip bore you much?"

"I am always bored at sea when I am not ill. I am usually ill."

"Oh! Really? How horrid! I am never ill. I always find the trip rather jolly. I go over to shop, and that would keep me up if nothing else did. Well, I think it was very good indeed of you—awfully good—to brave the horrors of the deep, or rather of your state-room, just to call on me."

She had a babyish voice and a delightful manner. The Duke smiled. He was really rather glad to see her again. "You were good enough to ask me to call if I ever came over," he said, "and it occurred to me that it would be a jolly thing to do. I only had little detached chats with you over there, and there were al-

ways a lot of Johnnies hanging about. I felt interested to see you in your own surroundings."

"Oh—perhaps you are going to write a book? I have always felt dreadfully afraid that you were clever. Well, don't make the mistake of thinking that we have only one type over here, as they always do when they come to write us up. There are just ten girls in my particular set—we have sets within sets, as you do, you know—and we are each one of us quite different from all the others. We are supposed to be the intellectual set, and Alexandra Maitland and Augusta Forbes are really frightfully clever. I don't know why they tolerate me—probably because I admire them. Augusta is my dearest friend. Alex pats me on the head and says that I am the leaven that keeps them from being a sodden lump of grey matter. I have addled my brains trying to keep up with them.

"Don't; you are much more charming as you are."

"Oh, dear! I don't know. Men always seem to get tired of me," she replied, with just how much ingenuousness the Duke could not determine. "Mrs. Burr says it is because I talk a blue streak and say nothing. Hal is quite too frightfully slangy. Augusta kisses me and says I am an inconsequential darling. She made me act in one of Howell's comedies once, and I did it badly on purpose, in the hope of raising my reputation, but Augusta said it was because I couldn't act. Fletcher Cuyler, who is the most impertinent man in New York said—— Have you seen Fletcher?"

"He came out on the tug to meet me, and left me at the door."

"I believe if Fletcher really has a deep down affec-

tion for anyone, it is for you—I mean for any man. He is devoted to all of us, and he is the only man we chum with. But we wouldn't have him at the meeting to-day. Do you know that I should have lent my valuable presence to two important meetings this afternoon?"

"Really?" The Duke was beginning to feel a trifle restless.

"Yes, we are going in frightfully for Socialism, you know—Socialism and the vote—and—oh, dozens of other things. Alex said we must, and so we did. It's great fun. We make speeches. At least, I don't, but the others do. Should you like to go to one of our meetings?"

"I should not!" said the Duke emphatically.

"Well, you must not make fun of us, for I am simply bent on having all the girls adore you, particularly Augusta. The other day we had a lovely meeting. It was here. I have the prettiest boudoir: Alex designed it. It looks just like a rainbow. I lay on the couch in a gown to match, and the girls all took off their stiff street frocks and put on my wrappers, and we smoked cigarettes and ate bonbons, and read Karl Marx. It was lovely! I didn't understand a word, but I *felt* intellectual—the atmosphere, you know. When we had finished a chapter and Alex had expounded it, and quarrelled over it with Augusta, we talked over all the men we knew, and I am sure men would be lots better if they knew what girls thought about them. Alex says we must regenerate them, quicken their souls, so to speak, and I suppose I may as well begin on you,

although you're not an American, and can't vote—we're for reforming the United States, you know. What is the state of your soul?" And again she gave her fresh childlike laugh.

"I haven't any. Give me up. I am hopeless." He was arriving at the conclusion that she was more amusing in detached chats, but reflected that she was certainly likeable. It was this last pertainment, added to the rumour of her father's vast wealth, that had brought him across the water.

"I don't know that I have ever seen one of the—what do they call them?—advanced women? But I am told that they are not Circean. That, indeed, seems to be their hall-mark. A woman's first duty is to be attractive."

"That's what Fletcher says. Augusta is my most intimate friend, my very dearest friend, but I never saw a man look as if he was thinking about falling in love with her. How long shall you stay?" she added quickly, perceiving that he was tiring of the subject.

"I?—oh—I don't know. Until you tell me that I bore you. I may take a run into Central America with Fletcher."

"Into what? Why that's days, and days, and days from here, and must be a horrid place to travel in."

"I thought Chicago was only twenty-four hours from New York."

"Oh, you funny, funny, deliciously funny Englishman! Why Central America doesn't belong to the United States at all. It's 'way down between North and South America or somewhere. I suppose you mean

middle America. We call Chicago and all that part of the country West."

"If it's middle it's central," said the Duke, imperturbably. "You cannot expect me to command the vernacular of your enormous country in a day."

He rose suddenly. A woman some twenty years older than Mabel had entered. Her face and air were excessively, almost aggressively refined, her carriage complacent, a trifle insolent. She was the faded prototype of her daughter. The resemblance was close and prophetic.

"My dear Duke," she said, shaking him warmly by the hand, "I am so flattered that you have come to us at once, and so glad to have the opportunity to thank you for your kindness to Mabel when she was in your dear delightful country. Take that chair, it is so much more comfortable." She herself sat upon an upright chair, and laid one hand lightly over the other. Her repose of manner was absolute. "The happiest days of my life were spent in England, when I was first married—it seems only day before yesterday—my husband and I went over and jaunted about England and Scotland and Wales in the most old-fashioned manner possible. For six months we rambled here and there, seeing everything—one was not ashamed of being a tourist in those days. We would not present a letter, we wanted to have a real honeymoon: we were so much in love. And to think that Aire Castle is so near that terrible Strid. I remember that we stood for an hour simply fascinated. Mr. Creighton wanted to take the stride, but I wouldn't let him. He has never been over with me since—he is so busy. I can't think how Mr. Forbes always manages

to go with his wife, unless it is true that he is jealous of her—although in common justice I must add that if she has ever given him cause no one knows it. I suppose it is on general principles, because she is such a beauty. Still I must say that if I were a man and married to a Southern woman I should want to get rid of her occasionally: they *are* so conceited and they do rattle on so about nothing. Virginia Forbes talks rather less than most Southern women; but I imagine that is to enhance the value of her velvety voice.”

The Duke, who had made two futile efforts to rise, now stood up resolutely.

“I am very sorry——” he began.

“Oh! *I* am so sorry you *will* rush away,” exclaimed his hostess. “I have barely heard you speak. You must come with us to the opera to-night. Do. Will you come informally to an early dinner, or will you join us in the box with Fletcher?”

“I will join you with Fletcher. And I must go—I have an engagement with him at the hotel—he is waiting for me. You are very kind—thanks, awfully. So jolly to be so hospitably received in a strange country.”

When he reached the side-walk, he drew a long breath. “My God!” he thought, “Is it a disease that waxes with age? Perhaps they get wound up sometimes and can’t stop. . . . And she is pretty now, but it’s dreadful to have the inevitable sprung on you in that way. What are the real old women like, I wonder? They must merely fade out like an old photograph. I can’t imagine one of them a substantial corpse. I shall feel as if I were married to a dissolving view. She is

charming now, but—oh, well, that is not the only thing to be taken into consideration.”

The Creighton house was on Murray Hill. He crossed over to Fifth Avenue and walked down toward the Waldorf, absently swinging his stick, regardless of many curious glances. “I wonder,” he thought, “I wonder if I ever dreamed of a honeymoon with the one woman. If I did, I have forgotten. What a bore it will be now.”

CHAPTER IV.

AUGUSTA returned home at six o'clock, not flushed with triumph, for she was too tired, but with an elated spirit. She had stood on a platform in an East Side hall surrounded by her friends, and to two dozen bedraggled females had made the first speech of her life. And it had been a good speech; she did not need assurance of that. She had stood as well as Alexandra Maitland, but had used certain little emphatic gestures (she was too independent to imitate anyone); and she had, with well-bred lack of patronage, assured her humble sisters, for three quarters of an hour, that they must sign the petition for Woman Franchise, and make all the other women on the East Side sign it: in order that they might be able to put down the liquor trust, reform their husbands, secure good government, and be happy ever after. She flattered herself that she had not used a single long word—and she prided herself upon her vocabulary—that she had spoken with the simplicity

and directness which characterised great orators and writers. Altogether, it was an experience to make any girl scorn fatigue; and when she entered her boudoir and found Mabel Creighton, she gave her a dazzling smile of welcome, and embraced her warmly. Mabel responded with a nervous hug and shed a tear.

"He's here!" she whispered ecstatically.

"Who?—Oh, your Duke. Did he propose right off? Do tell me." And she seated herself close beside her friend, and forgot that she was reforming the United States.

"No, but he told me that he had come over on purpose to see me."

"That's equal to a proposal," said Augusta decidedly. "Englishmen are very cautious. They are much better brought up than ours. Which is only another warning that we must take ours in hand. It is shocking the way they frivol. I'd rather you married an American for this reason; but if you love the Duke of Bosworth, I have nothing to say. Besides, you're the vine-and-tendrill sort; I don't know that you'd ever acquire any influence over a man; so it doesn't much matter. Now tell me about the Duke, dearest; I am so glad that he has come."

Mabel talked a steady stream for a half-hour, then hurried home to dress for the evening.

Mr. Forbes was standing before the fire in the drawing-room when his daughter entered, apparelled for the opera and subsequent ball. She wore a smart French gown of pale blue satin, a turquoise comb in her pale modishly dressed hair, and she carried herself with the spring and grace of her kind; but she was

very pale, and there were dark circles about her eyes.

"You look worn out, my dear," said her father, solicitously. "What have you been doing?"

Miss Forbes sank into a chair. "I went to two meetings, one at Hal's and one in the slums. I spoke for the first time, and it has rather taken it out of me."

"Would the victory of your 'cause' compensate for crow's feet?"

"Indeed it would. I really do not care. I am so glad that I have no beauty to lose. I might not take life so seriously if I had. I am beginning to have a suspicion that Mary Gallatin and several others have merely taken up these great questions as a fad. Here comes mamma. I am glad, for I am hungry. I had no time for tea to-day."

A *portière* was lifted aside by a servant, and Mrs. Forbes entered the room. But for the majesty of her carriage she looked younger than her daughter, so exquisitely chiselled were her features, so fresh and vivid her colouring. Virginia Forbes was thirty-nine and looked less than thirty. Her tall voluptuous figure had not outgrown a line of its early womanhood, her neck and arms were Greek. A Virginian by birth, she inherited her high-bred beauty from a line of ancestors that had been fathered in America by one of Elizabeth's courtiers. Her eyes had the slight fullness peculiar to the Southern woman; the colour, like that of the hair, was a dark brown warmed with a touch of red. Her curved, scarlet mouth was not full, but the lips were rarely without a pout, which lent its aid to the imperious charm of her face. There were those who averred that upon the rare

occasions when this lovely mouth was off guard it showed a hint in its modelling of self-will and cruelty. But few had seen it off guard.

She wore a tiara of diamonds, and on her neck three rows of large stones depending lightly from fine gold chains. Her gown was of pale green velvet, with a stomacher of diamonds. On her arm she carried an opera cloak of emerald green velvet lined with blue fox.

Mr. Forbes' cold brilliant eyes softened and smiled as she came toward him, flirting her lashes and lifting her chin. For this man, whose eyes were steel during all the hours of light, who controlled the destinies of railroads and other stupendous enterprises and was the back-bone of his political party, who had piled up millions as a child piles up blocks, and who had three times refused the nomination of his party for the highest gift of the nation, had worshipped his wife for twenty-two years. He turned toward his home at the close of each day with a pleasure that never lost its edge, exulting in the thought that ambition, love of admiration, and the onerous duties of the social leader could not tempt his wife to neglect him for an hour. He lavished fortunes upon her. She had an immense allowance to squander without record, a palace at Newport and another in the North Carolina mountains, a yacht, and jewels to the value of a million dollars. In all the years of their married life he had refused her but one dear desire—to live abroad in the glitter of courts, and receive the homage of princes. He had declined foreign missions again and again. "The very breath of life for me is in America," he had said with final decision. "And if I wanted office I should prefer the large re-

sponsibilities of the Presidency to the nagging worries of an Ambassador's life. The absurdities of foreign etiquette irritate me now when I can come and go as I like. If they were my daily portion I should end in a lunatic asylum. They are a lot of tin gods, anyhow, my dear. As for you, it is much more notable to shine as a particular star in a country of beauties, than to walk away from a lot of women who look as if they had been run through the same mould, and are only beauties by main strength." And on this point she was forced to submit. She did it with the better grace because she loved her husband with the depth and tenacity of a strong and passionate nature. His brain and will, the nobility and generosity of his character, had never ceased to exercise their enchantment, despite the men that paid her increasing court. Moreover, although the hard relentless pursuit of gold had aged his hair and skin, Mr. Forbes was a man of superb appearance. His head and features had great distinction; his face, when the hours of concentration were passed, was full of magnetism and life, his eyes of good-will and fire. His slender powerful figure betrayed little more than half of his fifty-one years. He was a splendid specimen of the American of the higher civilisation: with all the vitality and enthusiasm of youth, the wide knowledge and intelligence of more than his years, and a manner that could be polished and cold, or warm and spontaneous, at will.

For her daughter, Mrs. Forbes cared less. She had not the order of vanity which would have dispensed with a walking advertisement of her years, but she resented having borne an ugly duckling, one, moreover, that had tiresome fads. She had been her husband's

confidante in all his gigantic schemes, financial and political, and Augusta's intellectual kinks bored her.

She crossed the room and gave her husband's necktie a little twist. Mr. Forbes sustained the reputation of being the best-groomed man in New York, but it pleased her to think that she could improve him. Then she fluttered her eyelashes again.

"Do I look very beautiful?" she whispered.

He bent his head and kissed her.

"When you two get through spooning," remarked Miss Forbes in a tired voice, "suppose we go in to dinner."

"Don't flatter yourself that it is all for you," Mrs. Forbes said to her husband, "I am to meet an English peer to-night."

"Indeed," replied Mr. Forbes, smiling, "Have we another on the market? What is his price? Does he only want a roof? or will he take the whole castle, barring the name and the outside walls?"

"You are such an old cynic. This is the Duke of Bosworth, a very charming man, I am told. I don't know whether he is poverty-stricken or not. I believe he paid Mabel Creighton a good deal of attention in the autumn, when she was visiting in England."

"He wouldn't get much with her: Creighton is in a tight place. He may pull out, but he has three children besides Mabel. However, there are plenty of others to snap at this titled fish, no doubt."

"I hope not," said Augusta. "Dear Mabel is very fond of him; I am sure of that. He only arrived to-day, and is going with them to the opera to-night. How are you to meet him?"

"Fletcher Cuyler will bring him to my box, of course. Are not all distinguished foreigners brought to my shrine at once?"

"True," said Miss Forbes. "But *are* we going in to dinner? I have never heard Maurel in *Don Giovanni*, and I don't want to lose more than the first act."

"There is plenty of it. But let us go in to dinner, by all means."

CHAPTER V.

THE two tiers of boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House reserved for the beauty and fashion of New York flashed with the plumage of women and a thousand gems. Women of superb style, with little of artifice but much of art, gowned so smartly that only their intense vitality saved them from confusion with the fashion-plate, carrying themselves with a royal, albeit somewhat self-conscious air, many of them crowned like empresses, others starred like night, producing the effect *en masse* of resplendent beauty, and individually of deficiency in all upon which the centuries have set their seal, hung, two or three in a frame, against the curving walls and red background of the great house: suspended in air, these goddesses of a new civilisation as if with insolent challenge to all that had come to stare. To the music they paid no attention. They had come to decorate, not to listen; without them there would be no opera. The music lovers were stuffed on high, where they seemed to cling to the roof like flies. The people

in the parquette and orchestra chairs, in the dress-circle and balconies, came to see the hundreds of millions represented in the grand tier. Two rows of *blasé* club faces studded the long omnibus box. Behind the huge sleeves and voluminous skirts that sheathed their proudest possessions, were the men that had coined or inherited the wealth which made this triumphant exhibition possible.

As the curtain went down on the second act and the boxes emptied themselves of their male kind that other male kind might enter to do homage, two young men took their stand in the back of a box near the stage and scanned the house. One of them remarked after a few moments:

"I thought that all American women were beautiful. So far, I see only one."

"These are the New York fashionettes, my dear boy. Their pedigree is too short for aristocratic outline. You will observe that the pug is as yet unmitigated. Not that blood always tells, by any means: some of your old duchesses look like cooks. Our orchids travel on their style, grooming, and health, and you must admit that the general effect is stunning. Who is your beauty?"

"Directly in the middle of the house. Gad! she's a ripper."

"You are right. That is the prettiest woman in New York. And her pedigree is probably as good as yours."

"Who is she?"

"Mrs. Edward R. Forbes, the wife of one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the United States."

"Really!"

"That is her daughter beside her."

"Her what!"

"I always enjoy making that shot. It throws a flash-light on the pitiful lack of originality in man every time. But it is nothing for the petted wife of an American millionaire to look thirty when she is forty. It's the millionaire who looks sixty when he is fifty. I'm not including Forbes, by the way. That tall man of fine physique that has just left the box is he."

"Poor thing!"

"Oh, don't waste any pity on Forbes. He's the envy of half New York. She is devoted to him, and with good reason! there are few men that can touch him at any point. I shall take you over presently. The first thing a distinguished stranger, who has had the tip, does when he comes to New York is to pay his court at that shrine. What a pity you are booked. That girl will come in for forty millions."

The other set his face more stolidly.

"Pounds?"

"Oh, no—dollars. But they'll do."

"I have not spoken as yet, although I don't mind saying that that is what I came over for."

"I suppose you are in pretty deep—too deep to draw out?"

"I don't know that I want to. I can be frank with you, Fletcher. Is her father solid? American fortunes are so deucedly rickety. I am perfectly willing to state brutally that I wouldn't—couldn't—marry Venus unless I got a half million (pounds) with her and something of an income to boot."

"As far as I know Creighton stands pretty well toward the top. You can never tell though: American fortunes are so exaggerated. You see, the women whose husbands are worth five millions can make pretty much the same splurge as the twenty or thirty million ones. They know so well how to do it. For the matter of that there's one clever old *parvenu* here who has never handled more than a million and a half—as I happen to know, for I'm her lawyer—and who entertains with the best of them. Her house, clothes, jewels, are gorgeous. A shrewd old head like that can do a lot on an income of seventy thousand dollars a year. But Forbes, I should say, is worth his twenty millions—that's allowing for all embellishments—if he's worth a dollar, and Augusta is the only child. Unless America goes bankrupt, she'll come in for two-thirds of that one of these days, and an immense dot meanwhile."

At this moment Miss Creighton, who had been talking with charming vivacity to a group of visitors, dismissed them with tactful badinage, and beckoned to the two men in the back of the box.

"Sit down," she commanded. "What do you think, Fletcher? I stayed away from two important meetings to-day in order to receive the Duke. Was not that genuine American hospitality?"

She spoke lightly; but as her eyes sought the Englishman's, something seemed to flutter behind her almost transparent face.

"These fads! These fads!" exclaimed the young man addressed as Fletcher. "Have you resigned yourself to the New Woman, Bertie? The New York variety is in-

nocuous. They just have a real good time and the newspapers take them seriously and write them up, which they think is lovely."

"Nobody pays any attention to Fletcher Cuyler," said Miss Creighton with affected disdain. "We will make you all stare yet."

The Duke smiled absently. He was looking toward the box in the middle of the tier.

"I think women should have whatever diversion they can find or invent," he said. "Society does not do much for them."

The curtain rose.

"Keep quiet," ordered Cuyler. "I allow no talking in a box which I honour with my presence. That isn't what *I* ruin myself for."

He was a tall nervous blonde bald-headed man of the Duke's age, with an imp-like expression and dazzling teeth. Despite the fact that he was unwealthed, he was a fixed star in New York society; he not only knew more dukes and princes than any other man in the United States, but was intimate with them. He had smart English relatives and was a graduate of Oxford, where he had been the chosen friend of the heir to the Dukedom of Bosworth. His excessive liveliness, his adaptability and versatility, his audacity, eccentricities, cleverness, and his utter disregard of rank, had made him immensely popular in England. He was treated as something between a curio and a spoilt child; and if people guessed occasionally that his head was peculiarly level, they but approved him the more.

When the act was done and the box again invaded,

Cuyler carried the Englishman off to call on Mrs. Forbes. Her box was already crowded, and Mr. Forbes stood just outside the door. As the Duke was introduced to him, he contracted his eyelids, and a brief glance of contempt shot from eyes that looked twenty years younger than the fish-like orbs which involuntarily twitched as they met that dart. But Mr. Forbes was always courteous, and he spoke pleasantly to the young man of his father, whom he had known.

Cuyler entered the box. "Get out," he said, "every one of you. I've got a live duke out there. He's mortgaged for the rest of the evening and time's short." He drove the men out, then craned his long neck round the half-open door.

"Dukee, dukee," he called, "come hither."

The Duke, summoning what dignity he could, entered, and was presented. After he had paid a few moments' court to Mrs. Forbes, Cuyler deftly changed seats with him and plunged into an animated dispute with his hostess anent the vanishing charms of *Don Giovanni*.

The Duke leaned over Miss Forbes' chair with an air of languor, which was due to physical fatigue, contemplating her absently, and not taking the trouble to more than answer her remarks. Nevertheless, his prolonged if indifferent stare disturbed the girl who had known little susceptibility to men. There was something in the cold regard of his eye, the very weariness of his manner, which had its charm for the type of woman who is responsive to the magnetism of inertia, whom a more vital force repels. And his title, all that it represented, the pages of military glory it rustled, appealed

to the mind of the American girl who had felt the charm of English history. She was not a snob; she had given no thought to marrying a title; and if the man had repelled her, she would have relegated him to that far outer circle whence all were banished who bored her or achieved her disapproval; but a thin spell emanated from this cold self-contained personality and stirred her languid pulse. Practical as she was, she had a girl's imagination, and she saw in him all that he had not, haloed with an ancient title; behind him a great sweep of historical canvas. Then she remembered her friend; and envied her with the most violent emotion of her life.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Cuyler of the Duke, as they walked down the lobby. "I don't mean *la belle dame sans merci*; there's only one opinion on that subject. But Augusta? do you think you could stand her? If Forbes took the notion he'd come down with five million dollars without turning a hair."

"I could swallow her whole and without a grimace," said the Duke drily. "But I am half, two-thirds committed. I have no intention of making Miss Creighton ridiculous, although I shall be obliged to tell her father frankly that I cannot marry her unless he comes down with half a million. It's a disgusting thing to do, but I have no choice."

"Oh, don't go back on Mabel, of course. But I am sorry. However, *nous verrons*. If Creighton doesn't come to time, let me know. I am pretty positive I can arrange the other: I think I know my fair compatriot's weak spot. I suppose you go on with the Creightons to the big affair at the Schemmerhorn-Smiths to-night? Well, give Augusta a quarter of an hour or so of your

flattering attentions. It will do no harm, in any event. I feel like a conspirator, but I'd like to see you on your feet. Gad! I wish I had a title; I wouldn't be in debt as long as you have been."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Cuyler took the Duke to call on Mrs. Forbes in her house. It was five o'clock and the lamps were lit. Augusta's particular set were there, talking Socialism over their tea, and enlightening a half-dozen young men and elderly club *roués*, who listened with becoming gravity. Mrs. Forbes sat somewhat apart by the tea-table talking to three or four men on any subject but Socialism. She wore a gown of dark-red velvet with a collar of Venetian lace and sat in a large high-backed chair of ebony, inlaid with ivory. The seat was also high, and she looked somewhat like a queen on her throne, graciously receiving the homage of her courtiers. The drawing-room was twice as large as the Creighton's, the Duke noted as he entered. It was hung with dark-green velvet embroidered with a tree design in wood colour an inch thick. Every shade of green blended in the great apartment, and there was no other colour but the wood relief and the pink of the lamp-shades.

Mrs. Forbes did not rise, but she held out her hand to the stranger with so spontaneous a warmth that he felt as if he were receiving his first welcome in transatlantic parts. She had not shaken hands with him at the opera, and their brief conversation had been over

her shoulder; he now found that her eyes and hand, her womanly magnetism and almost regal manner combined to effect the impression: "New York, *c'est moi*. My hospitality to the elect few who win my favour is sincere and unbounded, the bitter envy of the cold and superfluous stranger without its gates; and, of all men, my dear Duke of Bosworth, you are the most genuinely welcome."

He wondered a little how she did it, but did not much care. It was a large beautiful gracious presence, and he was content, glad to bask in it. He forgot Augusta and Mabel, and took a low chair before her.

"I won't ask you how you like New York," she said, smiling again. She half divined his thoughts, and saw that he was clever despite an entire indifference to his natural abilities; and the sympathy of her nature conveyed what she thought.

"Oh, I do—now," he replied with unwonted enthusiasm. "I must say that the blind rush everybody seems to be in is a trifle disconcerting at first—it makes an Englishman feel, rather, as if his youngest child—the child of his old age, as it were, was on a dead run, and that he must rush after to see what it was all about or be left behind like an old fogey. Upon my word I feel fully ten years older than I did when I landed."

She laughed so heartily that he felt a sudden desire to say something really clever, and wondered why he usually took so little trouble.

"That is the very best statement of one of our racial differences I have heard," she said; "I shall remember to tell it to my husband. He will be delighted. I feel the rush myself at times, for I was born in a far more

languid climate. But New York is an electrifying place; it would fascinate you in time."

"It fascinates me already!" he said gallantly, "and it is certainly reposeful here."

"It is always the same, particularly at five o'clock," she replied.

"Does that mean that I can drop in sometimes at this hour?"

"*Will* you?"

"I am afraid I shall be tempted to come every day."

"That would be our pleasure," and again she smiled. It was a smile that had warmed older hearts than the weary young profligate's. "Augusta is almost invariably here and I usually am. Occasionally I drive down to bring my husband home."

The Duke understood her perfectly. Her graceful pleasure in meeting him was not to be misconstrued. As she turned to greet a new comer he regarded her closely. If she had not taken the trouble to convey her subtle warning, he should have guessed that she loved her husband. Then he fell to wondering what sort of a man Forbes was to have developed the abundant harvest of such a woman's nature. "She could easily have been made something very different in the wrong hands," he thought, "and not in one respect only but in many. What a mess I should have made of a nature like that! Little Miss Creighton, with her meagre and neutral make-up is about all I am equal to. This woman might have lifted me up once; but more likely I should have dragged her down. She is all woman, the kind that is controlled and moulded by the will of a man."

His eyes rested on her mouth. "She will hurt

Forbes some day, give him a pretty nasty time; but it won't be because she doesn't love him. And—she'll make him forget—when she gets ready. A man would forgive a woman like that anything."

She turned suddenly and met his eyes. "What are you thinking?" she demanded.

"That Mr. Forbes must be a remarkable man," he answered quickly. He rose. "I must go over and speak to Miss Forbes; but I shall come back."

Mabel's eyes were full of coquettish reproach. Augusta chaffed him for forgetting their existence. Her manner was not her mother's, but it was high-bred, and equally sincere. She presented him to the other girls, and to Mrs. Burr, who lifted her lorgnette, and regarded him with a prolonged and somewhat discomfiting stare. But it was difficult to embarrass the Duke of Bosworth. He went over and sat beside Mabel.

"I think I met him once," said Mrs. Burr to Augusta, "but he is so very unindividual that I cannot possibly remember."

"I think he is charming," said Miss Forbes. "I had quite a talk with him last night."

"He doesn't look stupid, but he's not precisely hypnotic."

"Oh, there's *something* about him!" exclaimed one of the other girls. "I feel sure that he's fascinating."

"He looks as though he knew so much of the world," said another, with equal enthusiasm.

"What's the matter with us?" demanded one of the young men.

"You haven't a title," said Mrs. Burr.

"Hal, you are quite too horrid. I have not thought

of his title—not once. But Norry, you *can't* look like that, no matter how hard you try.”

“Oh yes I can; it's not so hard as you imagine; only it's not my chronic effect. When I am—ah—in-discreet enough to produce it, I have the grace to keep out of sight.”

“That is not what I mean.”

“Oh, he is an Englishman—with a title,” said the young man, huffily. “Miss Maitland, have you caught the fever?”

“I have either had all, or have outgrown the children's diseases, and I class the title-fever among them. I know that some get it late in life, but some people will catch anything. Our old butler has just had the mumps.”

“That's a jolly way of looking at it.”

“Oh you men are not altogether exempt,” said Mrs. Burr. “But the funniest case is Ellis Davis. He's just come back from London with a wild Cockney accent, calls himself ‘Daivis,’ and says ‘todai’ and the Princess of ‘Wailes,’ and ‘paiper.’ Probably he also says ‘caike’ and ‘laidy.’ I can't think where he got it, for he must have had *some* letters, and you may bet your prospects he presented them.”

“Possibly he saw more of the hotel servants and his barber than he did of the others,” suggested Miss Maitland.

“Or his ear may be defective, or his memory bad, and he got mixed,” replied Mrs. Burr. “We'll give him the benefit of the doubt; but I can't think why the most original people on earth want to imitate anyone. And yet they say we hate the English. Great heaven! Why,

we even drink the nasty concoction called English breakfast tea, a brand the English villagers would not give tuppence a pound for, simply because it has the magic word tacked onto it."

"We don't hate the English," said Augusta. "What nonsense. The Irish do, and the politicians toady to the Irish and control certain of the newspapers. That is all there is in it; but they make the most noise."

"And *we* grovel," said Mrs. Burr. "It is a pity we can't strike a happy medium."

"I think the greater part of the nation is indifferent," said Miss Maitland, "or at all events recognises the bond of blood and gratitude."

The Duke was making his peace with Mabel.

"I was afraid I bored you this morning," he said, "it is good of you not to tell me that you don't want to talk to me again for a week."

"You only stayed an hour. Did it seem so long?"

"I never paid a call of twenty minutes before," he said unblushingly.

"Oh, how sweet of you!"

"Not at all. Can I walk home with you? Is that proper?"

"Oh, there will be a lot of us together; and they will all want to talk to you."

"My valuable conversation shall be devoted to you alone." He hesitated a moment. "Shall you be at home this evening?"

She looked down, tucking the end of her glove under her cuff. "Yes, I rarely go out two nights in succession."

"May I call again?"

"Yes."

She looked up and met his eyes. "It has to be done," thought the Englishman, "there's no getting out of it now, and I may as well take the plunge and get over it. And she certainly is likable."

"They are going now," said Mabel.

He went over to Mrs. Forbes to make his adieux.

"I haven't given you any tea," she said. "It was stupid of me to forget it. You must come back to-morrow and have a cup."

"I shall come—for the tea," he said.

"And you must dine with us? Some day next week—Thursday?"

"Thanks, awfully; I'll come on any pretence."

"You must—Fletcher, take the Duke into the dining-room. It is so cold outside."

And to this invitation the Duke responded with no less grace, then walked home with Mabel and left her at her door, happy and elated.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. FORBES stood in his office, his eyes rivetted on a narrow belt of telegraph ticking which slipped loosely through his hands, yard after yard, from a machine on the table. As it fell to the floor and coiled and piled about him, until the upper part of his body alone was visible, it seemed to typify the rising waters of Wall Street. Outside, the city was white and radiant, under snow and electric light. In the comfortable office the curtains were drawn, a gas log flamed in the grate, and the electric loops were hot.

Mr. Forbes had stood motionless for an hour. His hat was on the back of his head. His brow was corrugated. His lips were pressed together, his eyes like flint. The secretary and clerk had addressed him twice, but had been given no heed. The hieroglyphics on that strip of white paper sliding so rapidly through his fingers had his brain in their grip. For the moment he was a financial machine, nothing more.

Suddenly the ticking was softly brushed from his hands, the coils about him kicked apart by a little foot, and he looked down into the face of his wife. She was enveloped in sables; her cheeks were brilliant with the pink of health and cold. Mr. Forbes' brow relaxed; he drew a deep sigh and removed his hat.

"Well! I am glad I came for you," she exclaimed.

"I believe you would have stood there all night. You looked like a statue. Is anything wrong?"

"I have merely stood here and watched a half million drift through my fingers," he said. "Northern Consolidated is dropping like a parachute that won't open. But let us go home. I am very glad you came down."

When they were in the brougham she slipped her hand into his under cover of the rug. "Are you worried?" she asked.

"No; I don't know that I am. I can hold on, and when this panic is over the stock will undoubtedly go up again. I have only a million in it. But I am sorry for Creighton. About two-thirds of all he's got are in this railroad, and I'm afraid he won't be able to hold on. But let us drop the subject. The thing has got to rest until to-morrow morning, and I may as well rest, too. Besides, nothing weighs very heavily when I am at home. Are we booked for anything to-night?"

"There is Mary Gallatin's *musical*. She has Melba and Maurel. And there is the big dance at the Latimer Burr's. But if you are tired I don't care a rap about either. Augusta can go with Harriet."

"Do stay home; that's a good girl. I am tired; and what is worse, a lot of men will get me into the smoking-room and talk 'slump.' If I could spend the evening lying on the divan in your boudoir, while you read or played to me, I should feel that life was quite all that it should be."

"Well, you shall. We have so few good times together in winter."

He pressed her hand gratefully. "Tell me," he said after a moment, "do you think this Socialism mooning of Augusta's means anything?"

"No," she said contemptuously. "I hope that has not been worrying you. Girls must have their fads. Last year it was pink parrots; this year it is Socialism; next year it will be weddings. By the way, what do you think of the Duke?"

"I can't say I've thought about him at all."

"He is really quite charming."

"Is he? His title is, I suppose you mean. Have you seen him since?"

"Since when? Oh, the night of *Don Giovanni*. I forget that you had not been home to tea this week. He has dropped in with Fletcher several times."

"Ah! Well, I hope he improves on acquaintance. What does Augusta think of this magnificent specimen of English manhood?"

"I think she rather likes him. She has seen much more of him than I have, and says that she finds him extremely interesting."

"Good God!"

"But he must have something to him, Ned dear, for Augusta is very *difficile*. I never heard her say that a man was interesting before."

"And she has been surrounded by healthy well-grown self-respecting Americans all her life. The infatuation for titles is a germ disease with Americans, more particularly with New Yorkers. The moment the microbe strikes the blood, inflammation ensues, and the women that get it don't care whether the immediate

cause is a man or a remnant. Is his engagement to Mabel Creighton announced?"

"No; she told Augusta that he had spoken to her but not to her father—that Mr. Creighton was in such a bad humour about something she thought it best to wait awhile. I suppose it is this Northern Consolidated business."

"It certainly is. And if the Dukelet is impecunious, I am afraid Mabel won't get him, for there will be nothing to buy him with. Don't speak of this, however. Creighton may pull through: the stock may take a sudden jump, or he may have resources of which I know nothing. I should be the last to hint that he was in a hole. Don't talk any more here; it strains the voice so."

They were jolting over the rough stones of Fifth Avenue, where speech rasped and wounded the throat. The long picturesque street of varied architecture throbbed with the life of a winter's afternoon. The swarm of carriages on the white highway looked like huge black beetles with yellow eyes, multiplying without end. The sidewalks were crowded with opposing tides; girls of the orchid world, brightly dressed, taking their brisk constitutional; young men, smartly groomed, promenading with the ponderous tread of fashion; business men, rushing for the hotels where they could hear the late gossip of Wall Street; the rockets of the opera company, splendidly arrayed, and carrying themselves with a haughty swing which challenged the passing eye; and the contingent that had come to stare. But snow-clouds had brought an early dusk, and all were moving homeward. By the time the Forbes reached their house in

the upper part of the Avenue the sidewalks were almost deserted, and snow stars were whirling.

The halls and dining-room of the Forbes mansion were hung with tapestries; all the rooms, though homelike, were stately and imposing, subdued in colour and rich in effect. But if the house had been designed in the main as a proper setting for a very great lady, one boudoir and bedroom were the more personal encompassment of a beautiful and luxurious woman. The walls and windows and doors of the boudoir were hung with raw silk, opal-hued. The furniture was covered with the same material. On the floor was a white velvet carpet, touched here and there with pale colour. The opal effect was enhanced by the lamps and ornaments, which cunningly simulated the gem. In one corner was a small piano, enamelled white and opalised by the impressionist's brush.

The pink satin on the walls of the bedroom gleamed through the delicate mist of lace. A shower of lace half-concealed the low upholstered bed. The deep carpet was pink, the dressing-table a huge pink and white butterfly, with furnishings of pink coral inlaid with gold. A small alcove was walled with a looking-glass. Every four years, when Mr. Forbes was away at the National Convention, his wife refurnished these rooms. She was a woman of abounding variety and knew its potency.

Mr. Forbes passed the evening on the divan in the boudoir, while his wife, attired in a *négligée* of corn-coloured silk, her warm, heavy hair unbound, played Chopin with soft, smothered touch for an hour, then read to him the latest novel. It was one of many even-

ings, and when he told her that he was the happiest man alive, she remarked to herself: "It would be the same. I love him devotedly. Nevertheless, during these next few weeks he shall not be allowed to forget just how happy I do make him."

CHAPTER VIII.

FLETCHER CUYLER was banging with all his might on the upright piano in one corner of the parlour of his handsome bachelor-apartment. The door was thrown open and the servant announced in a solemn voice:

"His Grace, the Duke of Bosworth, sir."

A bald crown and a broad grin appeared for a moment above the top of the piano.

"Sit down. Make yourself easy while I finish this. It's a bravura I'm composing." And he returned to the keys.

"I wish you'd stop that infernal racket," said the Duke peevishly. "It's enough to tear the nerves out of a man's body. Besides, I want to talk to you."

But Cuyler played out his bravura to the thundering end; then came leaping down the room, swinging his long legs in the air as if they were strung on wires.

The Duke was staring into the fire, huddled together. He looked sullen and miserable.

"Hallo!" cried his host. "What's up? Anything wrong?"

"Nothing particular. I've made an infernal mess of things, that's all. I hear on good authority that Creigh-

ton has never been worth more than a million or so at any time, and is losing money; and, without conceit, I believe I could have had Miss Forbes."

"Conceit? You'd be a geranium-coloured donkey if you had the remotest doubt of the fact. She's fairly lunged at you. I've known Augusta Forbes since she was in long clothes—she was called 'Honey' until she was ten, if you can believe it; but at that age she insisted upon Augusta or nothing. Well, where was I?—I never knew her to come off her perch before. She always went in more or less for the intellectual, and of late has been addling her poor little brain with the problems of the day. Well, the end is not yet. Have you spoken to Mr. Creighton?"

"No; I barely have the honour of his acquaintance. Upon the rare occasions when he graces his own table he's as solemn as a mummy. I'm willing to admit that I have not yet summoned up courage to ask him for an interview. He's polite enough, but he certainly is not encouraging."

"Oh, all the big men are grumpy just now. The richer they are the more they have to lose. Well, whichever way it works out, you have my best wishes. I'd like to see Aire Castle restored."

"I believe in my heart that's all I'm in this dirty business for. I don't enjoy the sensation of the fortune-hunter. If I have any strong interest left in life beyond seeing the old place as it should be I am not conscious of it."

"Come, come, Bertie, brace up, for God's sake. Have a brandy and soda. You'll be blowing your brains out the first thing I know. Can't you get up a little

sentiment for Mabel Creighton? She's a dear little thing."

"I loved one woman once, and after she had ruined me, she left me for another man." He gave a short laugh. "She didn't have the decency to offer to support me, although she was making a good £60 a week. I don't appear to be as fortunate as some of my brothers. Oh, we are a lovely lot." He drank the brandy and soda, and resumed: "I have no love left in me for any woman. Mabel Creighton is a girl to be tolerated, that is all; and more so than Miss Forbes. Nevertheless, I wish I had taken things more slowly and met the latter before I was committed. You may as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb, and I am afraid I am not going to get enough with Miss Creighton to make it worth while. If he offered me two hundred thousand pounds, I don't believe I'd have the assurance to refuse."

The servant entered and thrust out a granitic arm, at the end of which was a wedgewood tray supporting a note.

"From Mrs. Forbes," said Cuyler. He read the note. "She wants to see me at once," he added. "I wonder what's up. Well, I must leave you. Go or stay, just as you like. And good luck to you."

CHAPTER IX.

THE Englishman sat tapping the top of his shoe with his stick for some moments after Cuyler had left, then rose abruptly, left the building, and hailing a hansom, drove down town to Mr. Creighton's office in the Equitable Building. The elevator shot him up to the fifth floor, and after losing his way in the vast corridors several times, he was finally steered to his quarry.

A boy who sat by a table in the private hall-way reading the sporting extra of an evening newspaper, took in his card. Mr. Creighton saw him at once. The room into which the Duke was shown was large, simply furnished, and flooded with light. The walls seemed to be all windows. The roar of Broadway came faintly up. A telegraph machine in the corner ticked intermittently, and slipped forth its coils of clean white ticking, so flimsy and so portentous. From an inner office came the sound of a type-writer.

Mr. Creighton rose and shook hands with his visitor, then closed the door leading into the next room and resumed his seat by a big desk covered with correspondence. He had a smooth-shaven determined face that had once been very good-looking, but there were bags under the anxious eyes, and his cheeks were haggard and lined.

"He is a man of few words—probably because his

wife is a woman of so many," thought the Duke. "I suppose I shall have to begin."

He was not a man of many words himself.

"I have come down here," he said, "because it seems impossible to find you at your house, and it is necessary that I should speak to you on a matter that concerns us both. I came to America to ask your daughter to marry me."

"Have you done so?"

"I have."

"Has she accepted you?"

"Of course she wishes to refer the matter to you."

"She wishes to marry you?"

"I think she does."

Mr. Creighton sighed heavily. He wheeled about and looked through the window.

"I wish she could," he said,—*"if she loves you. I don't know you. I haven't had time to think about you. I should prefer that she married an American, myself, but I should never have crossed her so long as she chose a gentleman and a man of honour. I know nothing of your record. Were the marriage possible, I should enquire into it. But I am afraid that it is not. I am well aware—pardon my abruptness—that no Englishman of your rank comes to America for a wife if his income is sufficient to enable him to marry in his own country."* He paused a moment. Then he resumed. The effort was apparent. "I must ask your confidence for a time—but it is necessary to tell you that I am seriously involved; in short, if things don't mend, and quickly, I shall go to pieces."

The Duke was sitting forward, staring at the carpet,

his chin pressed hard upon the head of his stick. "I am sorry," he said, "very sorry."

"So am I. Mabel has two hundred thousand dollars of her own. I have as much more, something over, in land that is as yet unmortgaged; but that is not the amount you came for."

The Duke of Bosworth was traversing the most uncomfortable moments of his life. He opened his mouth twice to speak before he could frame a reply that should not insult his host and show himself the exponent of a type for which he suddenly experienced a profound disgust.

"Aire Castle," he said finally, "is half a ruin. All the land I have inherited which is not entailed is mortgaged to the hilt. I may add that I also inherited about half of the mortgages. My income is a pittance. It would cost two hundred thousand pounds to repair the castle—and until it is repaired, I have no home to offer a wife. In common justice to a woman, I must look out that she brings money with her. That is my position. It is a nasty one. It is good of you not to call me a fortune-hunter and order me out."

"Well, well, at least you have not intimated that you are conferring an inestimable honour in asking me to regild your coronet. I appreciate your position. It is ugly. So is mine. Thank you for being frank."

The Englishman rose. He held out his hand. "I hope you'll come out all right," he said, with a sudden and rare burst of warmth. "I do indeed. Good luck to you."

Mr. Creighton shook his hand heartily. "Thank you. I won't. But I'm glad you feel that way."

He went with his guest to the outer door. The boy had disappeared. Mr. Creighton opened the door. The Duke was about to pass out. He turned back, hesitated a moment. "I shall go up and see your daughter at once," he said. "Have I your permission to tell her what—what—you have told me?"

"Yes," said Mr. Creighton. "She must know sooner or later."

CHAPTER X.

THE Duke did not call a hansom when he reached the street. The interview to come was several times more trying to face than the last had been; he preferred to walk the miles between the Equitable Building and Murray Hill.

He reached the house in an hour. Miss Creighton was in the library reading a novel by the fire, and looked up brightly as he entered.

"You are a very bad man," she said, "I have waited in for you all day, and it is now half-past four. I am reading *Kenilworth*. The love scenes are too funny for words. Amy hangs upon Leicester's neck and exclaims 'My noble earl!' Fancy if I called you 'My noble duke.' How perfectly funny!"

The Duke took his stand on the hearth-rug—man's immemorial citadel of defence—and tapped his chin with his hat, regarding Mabel stolidly with his fishy pale-blue gaze. He was cross and uncomfortable and hated himself, but his face expressed nothing.

"I have seen your father," he said.

"Oh—have you? What—what did he say?"

"When I asked you to marry me I explained how I was situated."

"I know—won't papa?—He's very generous."

"He can't. He is very seriously embarrassed."

The girl's breath shortened painfully. She turned very white. Unconsciously she twisted her hands together.

"Then we cannot marry?"

"How can we? Do you want to spend your life hounded by lawyers, money-lenders, and financial syndicates, and unable to keep up your position? You would die of misery, poor child. I am not a man to make a woman happy on three hundred thousand pounds a year. Poor! It would be hell."

She did not look up, but sat twirling her rings.

"You know best," she said, "I don't know the conditions of life in England. If you say that we should be miserable, you must know. I suppose you did not love me very much."

"Not much, Mabel. I have only the skeleton of a heart in me. I wonder it does duty at all. You are well rid of me."

"You certainly did not make any very violent protestations. I cannot accuse you of hypocrisy."

"One thing—I was not half good enough for you. As far as I can remember this is the first time I have ever humbled myself. You are a jolly little thing and deserve better luck."

She made no reply.

"I shall cross almost immediately—shall give it out that you have refused me."

"You need not. I have told no one but Augusta. People will think that we are merely good friends. We will treat each other in a frank off-hand manner when we meet out."

"You are a game little thing! You'd make a good wife, a good fellow to chum with. I wish it could have come round our way."

He was quick of instinct, and divined that she wanted to be alone.

"*Au revoir*," he said. "We meet to-night at dinner, somewhere, don't we?"

"At the Burr's." She rose and held out her hand. She was very pale, but quite composed, and her flower-like face had the dignity which self-respect so swiftly conceives and delivers. He had never been so near to loving her. She had bored him a good deal during the past weeks, but he suddenly saw possibilities in her. They were not great, but they would have meant something to him. He wanted to kiss her, but raised her hand to his lips instead, and went out.

Mabel waited until she heard the front door close, then ran up to her room and locked herself in.

"I mustn't cry," was her only thought for the moment.

"I mustn't—mustn't! My eyes are always swollen for four hours and my nose gets such a funny pink. I remember Augusta once quoted some poetry about it. I forget it."

She looked at the divan. It exerted a powerful magnetism. She saw herself lying face downward, sobbing. She caught hold of a chair to hold herself back. "I can't!" she thought. "I can't! I must brace up for

that dinner. The girls must never know. Oh! I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!"

"I wish I were dead!" She said it aloud several times, thinking it might lighten the weight in her breast. But it did not. She looked at the clock and shuddered. "It is only five. What am I to do until Lena comes to dress me? She won't come until half-past six. I can't go to mamma; she would drive me distracted. Oh! I think I am going mad—but I *won't* make a fool of myself."

She walked up and down the room, clenching her hands until the nails bit the soft palms. "I read somewhere," she continued aloud, "that the clever people suffered most, that their nerves are more developed or something. I wonder what that must be like. Poor things! I am not clever, and I feel as if I'd dig my grave with my own fingers if I could get into it. Oh! Am I going to cry? I won't. I'll think about something that will make me angry. Augusta. She'll get him now. She's wanted him from the first. I've seen it. She was honourable enough not to regularly try to cut me out, but there's nothing in the way now. And she will. I know she will. I hate her. I hate her. Oh, God! *What* shall I do?"

She heard the front door open; a moment later her father ascend the stair and enter his room. She ran across the hall, opened his door without ceremony and caught him about the neck, but still without tears.

He set his lips and held her close. Then he kissed and fondled her as he had not done for years. "Poor little girl," he said. "I am a terrible failure. God

knows I should have been glad to have bought your happiness for you. As it is, I am afraid I have ruined it."

She noticed for the first time how worn and old he looked. Her development had been rapid during the last hour. She passed on to a new phase. "Poor papa," she said, putting her hands about his face. "It must be awful for you, and you have never told us. Listen. *He* said I would make a plucky wife, a good fellow. I'll take care of you and brace you up. I'll be everything to you, papa; indeed I will. Papa, you are not crying! Don't! I have to go out to dinner to-night! Listen. I don't care much. Indeed I don't. I'm sure I often wondered why he attracted me so much when I thought him over. Alex says that if he were an American she wouldn't take the trouble to reform him—that he isn't worth it. And Hal says he looks like a dough pudding, half baked. It's dreadful that we can't control our feelings better—Papa, give me every spare moment you can, won't you? I can't stand the thought of the girls."

"Yes," he said, "every minute; and as soon as I can we'll go off somewhere together. It would be a great holiday for me. It is terrible for me to see you suffer, but I am selfish enough to be glad that I shall not lose you. Stay with me awhile. This will pass. You can't believe that now, but it will; and the next time you love, the man will be more worthy of you. I don't want to hurt you, my darling, but for the life of me, I can't think what you see in him."

CHAPTER XI.

THAT evening, shortly after Miss Forbes had been dressed for Mrs. Burr's dinner, her mother entered and dismissed the maid.

"What is it, mamma?" Augusta demanded in some surprise. "How odd you look. Not as pretty as usual."

Mrs. Forbes' lips had withdrawn from their pout; her whole face had lost its sensuousness and seemed to have settled into rigid lines. She went over to the fire and lifted one foot to the fender, then turned and looked at her daughter.

"Do you wish to marry the Duke of Bosworth?" she asked abruptly.

A wave of red rose slowly to Augusta's hair. Her lips parted. "What do you mean?" she enquired after a moment. Her voice was a little thick. "He is engaged to Mabel."

"He cannot marry Mabel. Mr. Creighton is on the verge of ruin."

Miss Forbes gasped. "Oh, how dreadful!" she exclaimed, but something seemed to suffuse her brain with light.

"You can marry him if you wish."

"But Mabel is my most intimate friend. It would be like outbidding her. She has the two hundred thou-

sand dollars that her grandmother left her, and her father could surely give her as much more."

"What would four hundred thousand dollars be to a ruined Duke, up to his ears in debt? He wants millions."

"But papa does not like him."

"Leave your father to me, and be guided entirely by me in this matter. I have a plan mapped out if he will not give his consent at once. Do you wish to marry this man?"

Miss Forbes drew a hard breath. "I want to marry him more than anything in the world," she said.

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT the same time, as the Duke of Bosworth was dressing for dinner in his rooms at The Waldorf, he received the following note:—

“DUKY, DUKY, DADDLEDUMS!—I have great news for you. Rush your engagements, and come here between twelve and one to-night.
F. C.”

As the young Englishman entered Cuyler's rooms a little after midnight, he received such warmth of greeting from a powerful hand concealed behind the *portière* that his backbone doubled.

“For God's sake, Fletcher,” he said crossly, “remember that I am not a Hercules. What do you want of me?”

“Sit down. Sit down. I'll put you in a good humour if I have to break a bank. I've pledged it to my peace of mind. Well, first—Creighton has practically gone to smash.”

“I know it. He told me so this afternoon. Poor man, I felt sorry for him; and I think he did for me, although his respect may have been something less than his pity. I know I felt uncommonly cheap, and if he had kicked me out I doubt if I should have resented it.

He said that what with his daughter's fortune and some land investments, he might scrape together a hundred thousand pounds. I told him it wouldn't pay my debts. Then I had an interview with her. Don't ask me to repeat it. Good God, what have we come to? Drop the subject."

"I haven't begun yet. My conscience wouldn't rest, however, unless I paused to remark that I am deuced sorry for the Creightons. They are the best sort, and I hate to see them go under. Well, to proceed. You can have Miss Forbes."

The nobleman's dull eyes opened. "What do you mean?"

"I had an interview of a purely diplomatic nature with *la belle mère* after I left you. She is willing. Miss Forbes is willing. Nay, willing is not the word. I named your price—the modest sum of \$5,000,000. She said you should have it."

"But Mr. Forbes despises me. By Heaven, I have more respect for that man than for anybody I have met in America. Every time I meet those steel eyes of his I seem to read: 'You poor, miserable, little wretch of a fortune-hunter! Go home and blow out your brains, but don't disgrace your name by bartering it for our screaming eagles.' He'll never consent."

"My boy, you need a B. and S. Do brace up." Fletcher wagged his head pathetically. "You'll have me crying in a minute. I've been on the verge of tears for the last three weeks. Now let me tell you that you are all right. There may be a tussle, but Forbes is bound to cave in the end. He is infatuated with his wife and she knows her power. She is as set on this match as

you could be. She's had the bee in her bonnet for a good many years, to cut as great a dash in London as she does in New York. Of course she's in it in a way when she's over there for a month or two during the season, but she wants a long sight more than that. Her ancestry does her no good because the English trunk of the family died out two hundred years ago. As your mother-in-law she'd be out of sight. A woman with her beauty and brain and style and charm could bring any society in the world to her feet, and keep it there once she had those feet planted beyond the door-mat. Now she is patronised pleasantly as one of many pretty American women who flit back and forth. You've got a powerful ally, and one that's bound to win. Now pull up that long face or I'll hold you under the cold water spout!"

"I believe you have put new life into me," said his Grace, the Duke of Bosworth.

CHAPTER XIII.

AUGUSTA was moving restlessly about her boudoir. Her mind was uneasy and a trifle harrowed. For the first time in her life she was not thoroughly satisfied with herself. Once she sat down and opened "Progress and Poverty;" but George had ceased to charm, and she resumed her restless marching. Her boudoir was a scarlet confusion of silk and *crêpe*, and conducive to cheerfulness. Although it extinguished her drab colouring, Augusta usually felt her best in its glow and warmth; but to-day she felt her worst.

Suddenly she paused. There was a sound of rapid ascent of stair and familiar voices. She opened her door, and a moment later Mrs. Burr and Miss Maitland entered. Both looked unusually grave, and slightly pugnacious. Augusta experienced a disagreeable sensation in her knees.

"Has anything happened?" she asked, after she had greeted them and they were seated.

"Augusta!" said Miss Maitland sternly, "we are perhaps meddling in what is none of our affair; nevertheless, we have made up our minds to speak."

"Well?"

"Are you trying to get the Duke of Bosworth away from Mabel Creighton?"

"I am not."

"It looks like it."

"Does it?"

"You are keeping something back, Augusta," said Mrs. Burr. "Out with it."

Miss Forbes recovered herself. "I am going to marry the Duke of Bosworth," she said distinctly.

"Augusta Forbes!"

"Yes; and I have not cut out Mabel Creighton. I am perfectly willing to justify myself to you, as we have always kept to our compact to stand the truth from each other. He came over here to marry Mabel, but Mr. Creighton could not give him the portion—dot—you know. He is dreadfully embarrassed, *but that is a dead secret.*"

"And you have out-bid her?"

"I have done nothing of the sort. The thing was quite settled before the Duke spoke to me."

"He didn't lose much time. He must have been pretty sure how he would be received before he wound up with Mabel."

"I did not discuss that part of it with him."

"It's too bad you didn't discuss less. Poor Mabel is a wreck. The way she is trying to keep up is positively pathetic."

"Well, my not marrying him would not help her."

"Augusta, you are wood all through."

The young matron threw herself back in her chair, and beat her knuckles sharply with her lorgnette. Miss Maitland, who had not spoken for some moments, now unburdened herself.

"I have a good deal to say, Augusta, and I am go-

ing to say it. You know we all agreed before we came out that we would regard certain matters in a different light from that of most fashionable girls; we agreed, among other things, that, while enjoying all that our wealth and position offered us, we would read, and think, and endeavour to be of some use in the world—not write polemical novels, or belong to clubs, or anything of that sort, but take the very best advantages of the accident of our birth. And we also agreed—do you remember?—that we would cultivate higher ideals than most women care for—particularly in our relations to each other and to men. It is three years since that subject was discussed; but you remember it, I suppose.”

“I do, and I have not broken it.”

“Very well, I shall say no more about that particular phase of the matter; that is for you to settle with your own conscience, and with Mabel. This is what we are chiefly concerned with: there are several ways by which our example can benefit society, and the chief of them is to stop marrying impecunious foreign nobles!”

She paused a moment. Augusta stiffened up, but made no reply. Miss Maitland resumed:

“As long as we continue to jump at titles whenever they come gold-hunting and Jew-flying, just so long shall we—the upper class of the United States, which should be its best—be contemptible in the eyes of the world. Just so long shall we be sneered at in the newspapers, lampooned in novels, excoriated by serious outsiders, and occupy an entirely false place in contemporary history. We are so conspicuous, that everything we do is tittle-tattled in the Press—we are such a god-send to

them that it is a thousand pities we don't give them something worth writing about. Now, my idea is this: that all we New York girls band together and vow not to marry any foreigner of title, English or otherwise, unless he can cap our prospective inheritance by twice the amount—which is equivalent to vowing that we will go untitled to our graves. Also, that such girls as we fail to convert from this nonsensical snobbery, and who insist upon marrying titles whenever they can get them, will see none of us at their weddings.

“Now this is the point: That would not only express to the whole world our contempt for the alliance of the fortune-hunter and the snob, but it would raise the self-esteem of our own men, and be one step toward making them better than they are. You couldn't convince one of them that we are not all watching the foreign horizon with spy-glasses, waiting to make a break for the first title that appears, and that they have not got to be content with the leavings. But if they saw that we really desired to marry Americans, and, above all, men that we could love and respect, I believe they would make an effort to be worthy of us. That would certainly be one great step gained. The next thing for us to do is to be able to love hard enough to awaken the right kind of love in men.”

“Well?” asked Augusta.

Miss Maitland's cheeks were flushed. She looked almost beautiful. Augusta felt that she looked pasty, but did not care. She was angry, but determined to control herself.

“You have a great opportunity. Dismiss the Duke of Bosworth, and avow openly that you will only marry

an American—that the American at his best is your ideal. How it can be otherwise, as the daughter of your father, passes my comprehension. Will you?”

“Bravo, Alexis!” said Mrs. Burr. “We’ll have to find a man who’s hunting for an ideal woman. And you didn’t mention Socialism once.”

“That belongs to the future. I have come to the conclusion that we must build the house before we can fresco the walls.”

Augusta had risen, and was walking up and down the room. At the end of three or four minutes she paused and faced her visitors, looking down upon them with her habitual calm, slightly accentuated.

“A month ago I should have agreed with you,” she said. “Your ideas, Alex, are always splendid, and, usually, no one is more willing to adopt them than I. But theories sometimes collide with facts. I am going to marry the Duke of Bosworth.”

They rose.

“I hope you’ll scratch each other’s eyes out!” said Mrs. Burr.

“You married for money,” retorted Augusta.

“I did, and my reasons were good ones, as you know. Moreover, I married a man, and an American. If I hadn’t liked him, and if he’d looked as if he’d been boiled for soup, I wouldn’t have looked at him if he’d owned Colorado. Latimer’s wings are not sprouting, and he doesn’t take kindly to the idea of being reformed, but I don’t regret having married him—not for a minute. You will. Maybe you won’t though.”

Miss Maitland had fastened her coat. She gave her muff a little shake.

"Good-bye, Augusta," she said icily. "It is too bad that you inherited nothing from your father but his iron will."

And without shaking hands they went out.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUT although Augusta had maintained an attitude of stiff defiance, she was by no means pleased with herself. She rang for her maid, dressed for the street, and a few moments later was on her way to Murray Hill. When she reached the Creighton's she went directly up to Mabel's room, and, after a hasty tap, entered. Mabel was lying full-length on the divan among her rainbow pillows, a silver bottle of smelling-salts at her nose.

She rose at once.

"I have a headache," she said coldly. "Sit down."

"Mabel!" said Augusta precipitately, "should you think me dishonourable if I married the Duke of Bosworth?"

"If I did would it make any difference?"

"No; but I'd rather you didn't."

Mabel turned her head away and looked into the logs burning on the hearth.

"Until you yourself told me that it was over," pursued Augusta, "I gave him no sort of encouragement; but as you cannot marry him yourself, I don't see why I shouldn't."

"No; I suppose there is no reason why you shouldn't. Only it is something I couldn't do myself."

"You don't know whether you could or not. Nobody knows what abstract sentiments he'll sacrifice when he wants a thing badly. If somebody suddenly died and left you a fortune, wouldn't you take him from me if you could?"

"Yes, I would."

"Well, that would be much more dishonourable than anything I have done."

"I suppose so. I don't care. I don't call that kind of thing honour. I wouldn't have done it in the first place."

"I fail to see any distinction, Mabel. You never had any reasoning faculty. I am much more suited to the Duke, anyhow, for he is really clever."

"It isn't cleverness he's after."

"Oh, of course he must have money. One is used to that. It's like knowing that lots of people come to your house because you give good dinners; but you don't like them any the less; in fact, don't think about it. We have to take the world as we find it. If you regard the Duke as a fortune-hunter I wonder you can still love him."

Mabel turned her head and regarded Miss Forbes with a haughty stare. "I do not love him," she said, "I despise him too thoroughly. It is my pride only that is irritated. Don't let there be any doubt on that point."

"Well, I am delighted—relieved! It has worried me, made me genuinely unhappy; it has indeed, Mabel dear. I will admit that I had misgivings, that I was not altogether satisfied with myself; but now I can be

as happy as ever again. And you don't think it dishonourable? Please say that."

"No, I don't think it dishonourable; (for we are no longer friends)," she added to herself; but she was too generous to say it aloud.

Augusta went away a few minutes later, and Mabel, who was not going out that evening, flung herself on the divan, and sobbed into her cushions.

CHAPTER XV.

SEVERAL evenings later, a banquet was given to a party of Russian notables. As no young people were invited, Augusta, chaperoned by her father's sister, Mrs. Van Rhuys, arranged a theatre party, which included the English Duke.

As Mrs. Forbes stood between her mirrors that evening, she wondered if she had ever looked more lovely. She wore a gown of ivory white satin, so thick that it creaked, and entirely without trimming, save for the lace on the bust. But about the waist, one end hanging almost to the hem of the gown was a ribbon of large pigeon-blood rubies. A collar of the same gems lay at the base of her long round throat. Above her brow blazed a great star, the points set with diamonds, radiating from a massive ruby. A smaller star clasped the lace at her breast. The bracelets on her arms, the rings on her fingers, sparkled pink and white.

Her lips parted slightly. So thrilled was she with triumph, intoxicated with her beauty and magnificence.

For this woman could never become *blasé*, never cease to be vital, until the shroud claimed her.

Nevertheless, she felt unaccountably nervous. She had felt so all day.

"I am quite well, am I not, mammy?" she said to an old negro woman who sat regarding her with rapt admiration. The negress had been Virginia's nurse and personal attendant for thirty-nine years. Only the ocean—for which she had an unsurmountable horror—had separated them. In Augusta she had never taken the slightest interest, but over her idolised mistress she exercised an austere vigilance. And as she was a good old-fashioned doctor, and understood Mrs. Forbes' constitution as had it been a diagram of straight lines, she was always on the alert to checkmate nature, and rarely unsuccessful.

"You sut'n'y is, honey," she replied. "You never was pearter. No wonder you git 'cited sometimes with all dose purty things that cos' such heaps and heaps o' money. Yo' uster go wild over yore toys, and you al'ays will be de same."

It was not yet eight and Mrs. Forbes seated herself lightly on the old woman's knee. At that moment Augusta entered the room.

"Mother!" she exclaimed in a disgusted voice. "Do get up. I declare you are nothing but a big overgrown baby. If it isn't papa it's mammy, and if it isn't mammy it's papa."

"I suppose you can get through life without coddling," replied her mother, undisturbed; "but I can't. You look remarkably well this evening."

"Thanks." Miss Forbes regarded herself com-

placently in the mirror. She wore black and pink and there was colour in her face. "I'm no beauty, but I think I do look rather well, and this frock is certainly a stunning fit. You are a vision as usual. There is the carriage."

Mrs. Forbes rose and the maid enveloped her in a long mantle of white velvet lined with ermine. The old negress adjusted the inner flap over the chest and wrapped a lace scarf about the softly-dressed hair.

"You is a leetle nervous, honey," she said. "Has anything put yo' out? Don't you tetch one bit o' sweets to-night and not a drap o' coffee."

"I'll have it out when we come home, and get it over," thought Mrs. Forbes as she went down the stair and smiled to her husband, who awaited her in the hall below. "That is what is making me so nervous."

Mr. Forbes, like many New York millionaires, had spread his house over all the land he could buy in one spot on The Avenue, and there was no *porte cochère*. When his wife was obliged to go out in stormy weather an awning was erected between the front doors and the curb-stone. To-night it was snowing heavily. As she appeared on the stair two men-servants opened the doors and flung a carpet from the threshold to the carriage-step. If Virginia Forbes had ever wet her boots or slippers she could not recall the occasion.

She was the sensation of the dinner and of the reception afterward. The foreigners stood about her in a rivetted cluster, and with the extravagance of their kind assured her that there was no woman in Europe at once so beautiful and so clever. She took their flatteries for what they were worth; they could have salaamed before

her without turning her head; but she revelled in the adulation, nevertheless.

Mr. Forbes had two important letters to write when they returned home, and she went with him to the library. As he took the chair before his desk she got him a fresh pen, then poured him some whisky from the decanter. She was as fresh as when she had left the house, and he looked at her with passionate admiration.

"I should like to be able to tell you how proud I was of you to-night," he said. "Sometimes I believe that you are really the most splendid creature on earth."

"That is what those princelings were telling me," she said, rumpling his hair. "But you flatter me much more, for I may suspect that you mean it."

"Well, sit where I can't see you or I sha'n't do much writing. Don't go, though."

She took an easy chair by the fire, but although she lay in its depths and put her little feet on a low pouf, she drew the long rope of jewels nervously through her fingers. Once or twice her breath came short, and then she clasped the rubies so closely that the setting dented her skin.

"I must, must brace up," she thought. "Unless I am at my best I shall be no match for him, and I must win in the first round or it will be a long hard fight that I may not be equal to. Besides, I should hate it."

She was glad to have the interview in the library, her husband's favourite room. It was a long narrow room, lined to the ceiling with the books of seven generations: Mr. Forbes came of a line of men that had been noted for mental activity in one wise or another since

England had civilised America. There were busts and bas-reliefs of great men, and many pieces of old carved furniture. The curtains, carpet, and easy chairs were lit with red, and very luxurious. The mantel was of black onyx. Above it was a portrait of Mrs. Forbes by Sargeant. The great artist protested that he had interpreted "the very sky and sea-line of her soul." Certain it is that he had chosen to see only that which was noble and alluring. Imperious pride was in the poise of the head, the curve of the short upper lip; but it was the unself-conscious pride of race and the *autorité* of a lovely woman which all men delighted to foster. The eyes, sensuous, tender, expectant, were the eyes of a woman who had loved one man only, and that man with fond reiteration. The lower lip was full, the mouth slightly parted. The brow was so clear that it seemed to shed radiance. It uplifted the face, as if the soul dwelt there, at home with the vigorous brain.

Some thin white stuff was folded closely over the small low bust. A string of large pearls was wound in and out of the heavy hair, whose living warmth the artist had not failed to transfer. Indeed, warmth, life, passion, soul, intelligence seemed to emanate from this wonderful portrait, so combined by the limner as to convey an impression of modern womanhood perfected, satisfied, triumphant, to which the world could give no more, and from which the passing years would hesitate to steal aught. Sometimes Virginia Forbes stood and regarded it sadly. "It is an ideal me," she would think, "all that I should like to be—that I might—were it not for this trowelful of clay in my soul." Although Mr. Forbes was too keen a student of human nature to be

ignorant of his wife's faults, his faith was so strong in the large full side of her nature that he had long since felt justified in closing his eyes to all that fell below the ideal.

He wrote for an hour, then threw the pen down, rose, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Thank heaven that is over. I can sleep in peace. How good of you to wait for me. Are you very tired?"

"No," she said, and unconsciously her lips lost their fulness, and she clutched the stones so tightly that they bruised her flesh. "Will you sit down, Ned, dear? I want to talk to you."

"Is anything the matter?" he asked anxiously. "You've lost your colour since you came in. I am afraid you go too hard. New York is a killing place. Shall we go to Asheville for a week or two?"

"I never felt better. Sit down—there—where I can see you; and light a cigar. I am going to speak of something very important. You won't like what I say—at first; but I am sure you will when I have finished."

He sat down, much puzzled. "I don't want to smoke, and I'm afraid something has gone wrong with you. Have you been investing and lost? You know that I never ask what you do with your money, and if you are short all you have to do is to ask for more."

"You know that I never would invest money without your advice; and I have scarcely touched this year's income. It is about Augusta."

Mr. Forbes raised his brows. "Augusta? She doesn't want to take to the public platform, I hope."

"She is in love."

“What? Our calm, superior—with whom, for heaven’s sake?”

• “With the Duke of Bosworth.”

Mr. Forbes sat forward in his chair, pressing his hands upon its arms. The blood rose slowly and covered his face. “The Duke of Bosworth!” he ejaculated. “Do you mean to tell me that our daughter, and a girl who is American to her finger-tips, has had her head turned by a title?”

“It is not the title, Ned; it is the man——”

“Impossible! The man? Why, he’s not a man. He’s—but I don’t choose to express to you or to any woman what I think of him. I never set up to be a saint; I went the pace with other men before I married you; but in my opinion the best thing that remnants like Bosworth can do is to get into the family vault as quickly as possible and leave no second edition behind them. He’ll leave none of my blood.”

“You misjudge him, dear; I am sure you do. I have talked much with him. He is very intelligent, and, I think, would be glad to live his life over. It is his delicate physique that gives him the appearance of a wreck.”

“Excuse me. I have seen men of delicate physique all my life. I am also a man of the world. Sooner than have that puny demoralised creature the father of my grandchildren, I should gladly see Augusta spend her life alone—happy as we have been. I cannot understand it. She must be hypnotised. And you, Virginia! I am ashamed of you. I cannot believe that you have encouraged her. You, the cleverest and most sensible

woman I have ever known! Do you wish to see your daughter the wife of that man?"

"I should not if she were like some girls. But she has little sentiment and ideality. She is a strong masculine character, just the type to give new life and stamina to the decaying houses of the old world. She is not as clever as she thinks, but at thirty she will know her limitations and be a very level-headed well-balanced woman. She will shed no tears over the Duke's defections, and you know what Darwin says about the children of strong mothers and dissipated eldest sons. I am sure that Augusta's children will not disgrace you."

"What you say sounds well: I never yet knew you to fail to make out a good case when driven to a corner; but this miserable man's children will not be my grandchildren."

"Ned, you are so prejudiced. You are such a rampant American."

"I am, I hope. And you know perfectly well that I am not prejudiced. I know many members of the British peerage for whom I have hearty liking and respect. Some of the best brains the world has ever known have belonged to the English aristocracy. But this whelp—if he were the son of as good an American as I am do you think it would make any difference? And if he were worthy of his blood he could have my daughter and welcome."

Mrs. Forbes had controlled herself inflexibly, but she was conscious of increasing excitement. Her eyes looked as hard and brilliant as the jewels upon her. Her hands trembled as she played with her rope of rubies. She recognised that he was conclusive; that it would be worse

than folly to resort to endearment and cajolery, even could she bring herself to the mood. But before such uncompromising opposition her ambition cemented and controlled her, was near to torching reason and judgment. She would not trust herself to speak for a moment, but looked fixedly at her husband.

"I thought this little fortune-hunter was engaged to Mabel Creighton," he said abruptly.

"That was all a mistake——"

"He found out that Creighton was in a hole, I suppose. Virginia!—it is not possible?—you did not tell him?—you have not been scheming to bring about this damnable transaction?"

"Of course I did not tell him. I wish you wouldn't screw up your eyes like that at me. I saw before he had been here a week that he had fallen in love with Augusta——"

"Love be damned! Do you imagine a man like that loves?"

"Well, liked then. Of course he cannot afford to marry without money——"

"And I am expected to buy him, I suppose?"

"Don't be so coarse! Now listen to me, Ned. *I* want this match. Of course I should not move in the matter if I did not respect the Duke, and if Augusta didn't love him as much as she is capable of loving. But I want this English alliance—and there may never be another opportunity. I will state the fact plainly—it would give me the greatest possible satisfaction to know that my position was as assured in England as it is in America——"

"Good God! What is the matter with you American

women? If you sat down and worked it out, could you tell why you are all so mad about the English nobility? Or wouldn't you blush if you could? As I said the other day it is a germ disease—a species of brain-poisoning. It eats and rots. It demoralises like morphine and alcohol. After a woman has once let herself go, she is good for nothing else for the rest of her life. She eats, drinks, sleeps, thinks English aristocracy. Even you, if I gave you your head, would find it in you to become a veritable coronet-chaser—you!—my God! Well, it won't be in my time; and if Augusta runs off with this debased dishonoured little wretch she'll not get one cent of mine. And there will be no breaking of wills; I'll dispose of my fortune before I die. I shall take good care to let him know this at once, for I make no doubt he's desperate——”

Mrs. Forbes sprang to her feet. “You never spoke so to me before,” she cried furiously. “I do not believe you love me. So long as I spend my life studying your wishes—and I have studied them for twenty-two years—you are amiable and charming enough; but now that your wife and daughter want something that you don't wish to give them, that doesn't happen to suit your fancy, you turn upon me in your true character of a tyrant——”

“Virginia! hush!” said Mr. Forbes sternly. “I have done nothing of the sort. You are talking like a petulant child. Come here and tell me that you will think no more of this wretched business——”

He went forward, but she moved rapidly aside.

“Don't touch me,” she said, “I am not in the mood

to be touched. And I shall never be happy again if you refuse your consent to this marriage."

"Never be what? Has our happiness rested on so uncertain a foundation as that? I thought that you loved me."

"Oh, I do. Of course I do. But can't you understand that love isn't everything to a woman?—any more than it is to a man? I would be married to no other man on earth, not to a prince of the blood. But it is not everything to me any more than it is everything to you. Suppose you were suddenly stripped of your tremendous political influence, of your financial power, and reduced to the mere domestic and social round? Would I suffice? Not unless you were eighty and in need of a nurse."

She had drawn herself up to her full commanding height. Her head was thrown back, her nostrils were distended, her lips were a scarlet undulating line. There was no other colour in her face. It looked as opaque, as hard as ivory. The eyes were merciless; even their brown had lost its warmth. The jewels with which she was hung, which glowed with deep rufescent fire on her robe and neck and brow, gave her the appearance of an idol—an idol which had suddenly been informed with the spirit of pitiless ambition and spurned its creator.

Mr. Forbes had turned very grey. His nostrils and lips contracted. His teeth set. Involuntarily he glanced from the woman to the portrait. The portrait was more alive than the woman.

"Don't you understand?" she demanded.

"No," he said, "I don't think I do. At least I

hope I do not. At all events, I hope we may not discuss this subject again. I did not tell you that I intend to pull Creighton through. I cannot see an old friend go under. It will be to the Duke's interest to push his suit in that quarter—if they want him. Now, please go to your room. You are very much excited. If you were not I hardly think you would have spoken as you have."

He went to the end of the room and opened the door. She passed him quickly with averted head.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more father and daughter faced each other across the breakfast table. This time, Augusta, with a very red face, stared defiantly into bitter and contemptuous eyes.

"And your socialism? Do you expect to convert your Duke?"

"No, papa; of course not."

"It is exactly five weeks since you informed me that you wished me to devote my fortune to the dear people."

"I know it, papa. One looks at things very differently when one looks at them through a man's eyes, as it were—I mean through the eyes of the man one has fallen in love with; of course I always have had the highest respect for your opinion. Now, it seems to me a grand thing to restore the fortunes of an ancient and illustrious house——"

"That is the reason the good God permitted me to be born, I suppose—to sacrifice some ten or fifteen years of man's allotted span in accumulating millions with which to prop up a rotten aristocracy."

"Papa! I never knew you to be so bitter. You are quite unlike yourself this morning. Of course, we don't all look at things in the same way in this world.

But I don't wish you to think that I have entirely forsaken my old principles. I should do much good with my money in England. The poverty is said to be frightful there; and I hear that the working-men on the great estates only get a pound a week, and sometimes less. I should pay those on our estates more, myself."

"It doesn't occur to you, I suppose, that American-made millions should be spent in America, and that we have poverty enough of our own."

"Our poor are mostly Europeans," she retorted quickly.

He gave a brief laugh. "You have me there. Well; go on. You intend to reform this poor little trembling, sore-eyed, weak-kneed debauchee——"

"Father! I will not permit you to speak in that way of the Duke of Bosworth."

She had sprung from her chair. Like all phlegmatic natures, when the depths were stirred she was violent and ugly. She looked as if about to leap upon her parent and beat him.

He rose also and looked down on her. "You will not do what?" he said with a cutting contempt. "Go upstairs to your room, and stay there until I give you permission to leave it. And understand here, once for all, that not one dollar of mine will ever go into that man's pocket. If he marries you, he will have to support you, or you him: I shall not take the trouble to enquire which."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. FORBES was obliged to go that morning to Boston, to remain until the following evening. He did not see his wife before he left—had not seen her since the interview in the library. She had locked herself in her room, and he was not the man to hammer on a sulking woman's door.

Several men he knew were in his car, and he talked with them until the train reached Boston. There he was engrossed; he had barely time to snatch a few hours for sleep, none for thought. But the next day, after taking his chair in the train for New York, and observing that he knew no one in the car, he became aware that the heart within him was heavy. He and his wife had quarrelled before, for she had a hot Southern temper, and he was by no means without gunpowder of his own; but none of their disputes had left behind it the flavour of this. That she should tolerate such a man as Bosworth, had disappointed him; that she should espouse his pretensions to their only child, filled him with disgust and something like terror; and her snobbery sickened him. But what had stabbed into the quick of his heart were her final words. He repeated them again and again, hoping to dull their edge.

Moreover, she had never let the night set its ugly seal on their quarrels. Her tempers were soon over, and she had invariably come to him and commanded or coaxed for reconciliation, as her mood dictated. He had steered safely through the first trying years of matrimony, and it appalled him to think that perhaps an unreckoned future lay before them both.

When he entered his house something struck him as out of the common. A servant had fetched his portmanteau from the cab. It suddenly occurred to Mr. Forbes that the man had ostentatiously evaded his eye.

He walked toward the stair, hesitated, then turned.

"Is Mrs. Forbes well?" he asked; and he found that he was making an effort to control his voice.

The man flushed and hung his head. "Mrs. Forbes and Miss Augusta sailed for Europe this afternoon, sir. There's a letter for you on the mantelpiece in the library."

Mr. Forbes did not trust himself to say, "Ah!" As he turned the knob of the library door his hand trembled. He entered, and locked the door behind him.

He opened the letter at once and read it.

"I think you did not understand on Monday night that I was in earnest," it ran. "I am so much in earnest that I shall not stay here to bicker with you. That we have never done. I do not wish to run the risk of speaking again as I spoke the last time we were together. I know that I hurt you, and I am very sorry. If I did not believe that you were entirely wrong in the stand you have taken, I should not think of taking any

decisive step in the matter myself; for it hurts me to hurt you—please believe that. But I feel sure that as soon as you are alone and think it over calmly, you will see that your opposition is hardly warrantable, and that the wishes of your wife and daughter are worthy of serious consideration. If we remained to renew the subject constantly you would not give it this consideration; there would be an undignified and regrettable war of words every day.

“This is what I have made up my mind to do: if you persist in refusing your consent—which I cannot believe—I shall, on the tenth day of March, turn over all my own property to the Duke: my houses in Newport and Asheville, my horses and yacht, and my jewels. Two days later they will marry. I stand pledged to these two people that they shall marry, and nothing will induce me to break my word.

“I sail to-day with Augusta on the *Brétagne*; I go to Paris first to order the trousseau. My address will be the ‘Bristol;’ but I shall only be in Paris a week. From there I shall go to London—to the ‘Bristol.’ The Duke and Fletcher Cuyler sail to-day on the *Majestic*.

“I am afraid I have expressed myself brutally. My head aches. I am very nervous. I can hardly get my thoughts together, with all this hurry and confusion, and the unhappy knowledge that I am displeasing you. But this cloud that has fallen between us can be brushed aside; we can be happy again, and at once. It only rests with you.

“VIRGINIA.

“I have told Harriet to make a plausible explanation of our abrupt departure. She has a talent for that

sort of thing. No one need know that there has been the slightest difference of opinion."

Mr. Forbes dropped the letter to the floor, and leaned forward, his elbows digging into his knees, his hands pressed to his head.

He stared at the carpet. His face was as white as if someone had struck him a blow in a vital part. The tears gathered slowly in his eyes and rolled over his cheeks. Suddenly his hands covered his face; and sobs shook him from head to foot.

"What have I loved?" he thought. "What have I loved? Have I been in a fool's paradise for twenty-two years? Oh, my God!"

This woman had been the pre-eminent consideration of the best years of his life. He had loved her supremely. He had been faithful to her. He had poured millions at her feet, delighted to gratify her love of splendour and power. And never had a man seemed more justified. She had half lived in his arms. She had been his comrade and friend, a source of sympathy and repose and diversion and happiness that had never failed him; for nearly a quarter of a century. And now she had sold him, trodden in the dirt his will, his pride, his heart, that she might finger a coronet which could never be hers, but gloat over the tarnish on her fingers.

He sat there for many hours. Dinner was announced, but he paid no heed. He reviewed his married life. It had seemed to him very nearly perfect. It lost nothing in the retrospect. He doubted if many men were as happy as he had been, if many women

had as much to give to a man as Virginia Forbes. And now it had come to a full stop; to be resumed, pitted and truncated, in another chapter. The delight of being petted and spoiled and adored by a man whom all men respected, the love and communion upon which she had seemed passionately dependent, were chaff in the scale against her personal and social vanities.

Life had been very kind to him. Money, position, influential friends had been his birthright. His talents had been recognised in his early manhood. He had turned his original thousands into millions. No man in the United States stood higher in the public estimation, nor could have had a wider popularity, had he chosen to send his magnetism to the people. No American was more hospitably received abroad. Probably no man living was the object of more kindly envy. And yet he sat alone in his magnificent house and asked himself, "For what were mortals born?" His heart ached so that he could have torn it out and trampled on it. And the gall that bit the raw wound was the knowledge that he must go on loving this woman so long as life was in him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MRS. FORBES and her daughter had been in London two weeks. The engagement had been announced by the Duke a week previously, and was the sensation of the hour. The American newspapers were agog, but, as Mr. Forbes refused to be interviewed, were obliged to content themselves with daily bulletins from London. Mr. Forbes' opposition was suspected, but could not be verified. When congratulated, he replied diplomatically that he was not a warm advocate of international marriages. He hedged with a sense of bitter abasement, but he could not fling his dignity into the public maw.

Mrs. Van Rhuys informed people that, personally, her brother liked the Duke of Bosworth, but had hoped that Augusta would marry an American. She could not name the exact amount of the dowry; several millions, probably. The Duke seemed singularly indifferent. He wished the marriage to take place at once and in England, that his mother, who idolised him, might be present. Wherefore the sudden move, as the trousseau was of far more importance than the breaking of a dozen social engagements. Mr. Forbes would go over for the wedding, of course—unless this dreadful financial muddle prevented. She and her brother-in-

law, Schuyler Van Rhuys, who was nursing the wound inflicted by that unintelligible Californian, Helena Belmont, should go, in any case. No; the Duke had not jilted Mabel Creighton. On the contrary, Mabel might be said to have made the match. She and the Duke had known each other for a long while, and were the best of friends, nothing more.

All the folk in London of the Duke's set had called on Mrs. Forbes and the impending Duchess. A Parliament was sitting, there was a goodly number of them. The United States Ambassador gave a banquet in honour of the engagement, and it was the first of many attentions.

But the Duke was a man in whom few beyond his intimate circle took personal interest: he was cold, repellent, unpicturesque. The heiress had neither beauty nor the thistle-down attraction of the average American girl. It was Virginia Forbes who introduced a singular variation into this important but hackneyed transaction, and atoned for the paucities of the principal figures: she absorbed something more than two-thirds of the public attention. Her beauty, her distinction, her lively wit, her exquisite taste in dress, her jewels, above all her girlish appearance, commanded the reluctant admiration or the subtle envy of the women, the enthusiasm of the men, and the unflagging attentions of the weekly press. Her ancestry was suddenly discovered, and was a mine of glittering and illimited strata. Her photograph was printed in every paper which aimed to amuse a great and weary people, and was on sale in the shops. In short, she was the "news" of the hour; and the twentieth of his line and the lady

who would save the entail were the mere mechanism selected by Circumstance to steer a charming woman to her regalities.

"You certainly ought to be in a state of unleavened bliss," remarked her daughter with some sarcasm one evening as they sat together after tea, alone for the hour. "You simply laid your plans, sailed over, and down went London. I never knew anything quite so neat in my life. But it is in some people's lines to get everything they want, and I suppose you will to the end of the chapter."

Mrs. Forbes was gazing into the fire through the sticks of a fan. Her face was without its usual colour and her lips were contracted.

"Not a line from your father, and it is three weeks," she said abruptly.

"You did not expect *him*—father!—to come round in a whirl, I suppose. But why do you worry so? You know that it can end in one way only. We are all he has, and he adores us, and cannot live without us. It isn't as if he were fast, like so many New York men. I have not worried—not for a moment."

"How can you be so cold-blooded? I wish you knew the wretch I feel. If he does adore us, cannot you comprehend what we are making him suffer? Sometimes I think I can never make it up to him, not with all the devotion I am capable of, after this miserable business is over."

"Mother! You are not weakening? You will not retreat now that you have gone so far?"

"I have no intention of retreating. But I wish that I had stayed in New York and fought it out there. It

was a shocking and heartless thing to run away and leave him like that, a brutal and insulting thing; but when he told me that he should pull Mr. Creighton through, and speak to the Duke, this move seemed the only one that could save the game."

"And a very wise one it was. Father would have beaten you in the end—surely; he can do anything with you. I think it is humiliating to be part and parcel of a man like that."

"You know nothing of love. You are fascinated by a man who has the magnetism of indifference; that is all."

"I am quite sure that I love Bertie," said Miss Forbes with decision. "I have analysed myself thoroughly, and I feel convinced that it is love—although I thank my stars that I could never in any circumstances be so besottedly in love with a man as you are with dear papa. I do not pretend to deny that I am pleased, very pleased, at the idea of being a Duchess. All we American girls of the best families have good blue English blood in our veins, and it seems to me that in accepting the best that the mother country can offer us, we should feel no more flattered or excited than any English-born girl in the same circumstances. For the *nouveau riche*—the fungi—of course it is ridiculous, and also lamentable: they muddy a pure stream, and they are chromos in a jewelled frame. But there are many of us that should feel a certain gratitude to Providence that we are permitted to save from ruin the grand old families whose ancestors and ours played together, perhaps, as children. To me it is a sacred duty as well as a very great pleasure. Papa's English

ancestors may not have been as smart as yours, but he has seven generations of education and refinement, position and wealth behind him in the United States; he is the chief figure in the aristocracy of the United States; and in time he must see things as we do."

To this edifying homily Mrs. Forbes gave scant attention. She was tormented with conjectures of her husband's scorn and displeasure, picturing his loneliness. Sometimes she awoke suddenly in the night, lost the drift for the moment of conversation in company, saw a blank wall instead of the *mise en scène* of the play, her brain flaring with the enigma: "Will life ever be quite the same again?" She had had a second object in leaving New York abruptly: she believed that her husband could not stand the test of her absence and anger. But in the excitement and rush of those two days she had not looked into her deeper knowledge of him. She had known him very well. It was a dangerous experiment to wound a great nature, to shatter the delicate partition between illusion and an analytical mind.

"What a dreadful sigh!" expostulated Miss Forbes. "It is bad for the heart to sigh like that. I don't think you are very well. I don't think, lovely as you look, that you have been quite up to mark since we left New York."

"I suppose it is because I was ill crossing; I never was before, you know. And then it is the first time in my life that I have been away from both your father and mammy. I am so used to being taken care of that I feel as if I were doing the wrong thing all the time, and Marie is merely a toilette automaton. This morning the clothes were half off the bed when I woke up,

and the window was open; and yesterday Marie gave me the wrong wrap, and I was cold all the afternoon."

"Good heavens, mother!" cried Miss Forbes. "Fancy being thirty-nine and such a baby. I feel years older than you."

"And immeasurably superior. I suppose the petting and care I have had all my life would bore you. Well, your cold independent nature often makes me wonder what are its demands upon happiness. Does Bertie ever kiss you?"

"Occasionally; but I don't care much about kissing. We discuss the questions of the day."

"Poor man!"

"I am sure that he likes it, and we shall get along admirably. I am the stronger nature, and I feel reasonably certain that I shall acquire great influence over him, and make an exemplary man of him."

"Great heavens!" thought Mrs. Forbes. "A plain passionless pseudo-intellectual girl reforming an English profligate! What a sight for the gods!"

"I hope papa will come round before the wedding, because I wish only the interest of my dowry settled on us, and it takes a man to hold out on that point. That would give me the upper hand in a way. You have not written to him since we left, have you?"

"No."

"Don't you think it is time?"

"I intend to write by to-morrow's steamer."

"Do make him really understand that he is forcing you to sacrifice the houses and jewels to which you are so much attached."

"I shall make it as strong as I can."

"I'll write to Aunt Harriet, and tell her to talk to him. Poor dear papa, I am afraid he is lonesome. I wish he would come over so that we could all be together again. Give him my love and a kiss."

"You certainly have a magnificent sense of humour."

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. FORBES read his wife's second letter with dry eyes. His face, during the past weeks, had been habitually hard and severe. He looked older. It was a long letter. It was fragrant with love and admitted remorse; but it reasserted that unless he made the required settlement three weeks from receipt she would hand over to the Duke's attorneys all she possessed.

Mr. Forbes tore the letter into strips and threw them on the fire. His face had flushed as he read; and as he lay back in his chair, it relaxed somewhat.

"If she were here would I yield?" he thought. "I am thankful that she is not. Or am I? I don't know. What fools we mortals be—in the hands of a woman. Five millions seem a small price to have her back. But to pay them, unfortunately, means the free gift of my self-respect. What is to come? What is to come? I had believed at times that this woman read my very soul and touched it. Her intuitions, her sympathy, her subtle comprehension of the highest wants of a man's nature and reverence for them amounted to something like genius. Indeed, she had a genius for loving—a most uncommon gift. Or so it seemed to me. But I

think that few men would appreciate that they were idealising a woman like Virginia Forbes. And now? I am to take back the beautiful woman, the companionable mind, I suppose—nothing more. But it is something to have been a fool for twenty-two years. I cannot say that I have any regrets. And possibly it was my own fault that I could not make her love me better.”

He looked up at the picture. “Several times,” he thought, “I have felt like mounting a chair and kissing it. And if I did, I should feel as if I were kissing the lips of a corpse.”

“Ned! Are you there?”

Mr. Forbes rose instantly. The door had opened, and a tall woman, not unlike Augusta, but with something more of mellowness, had entered.

“I am glad to see you, Harriet,” he said. “What brings you at this hour? Have you come to help me through my solitary dinner?”

“I will stay to dinner, certainly.” Mrs. Van Rhuys took the chair he offered, and looked at him keenly. “I have just received a letter from Augusta,” she said. “Do withdraw your opposition, Ned. Yield gracefully, before the world knows what it is beginning to suspect. And a man can never hold out against his woman-kind. He might just as well give in at once and save wrinkles.”

“What is your personal opinion of the Duke of Bosworth?” asked Mr. Forbes curtly.

“Well, I certainly should have chosen a finer sample of the English aristocracy for Augusta, but I cannot sympathise with your violent antipathy to him. His manners are remarkably good for an Englishman, and

it would be one of the most notable marriages in American history."

"You women are all alike," said Mr. Forbes contemptuously. "Would you give your daughter to this man?"

"Assuredly. I am positive that when the little Duke settles down he will be all that could be desired. He has something to live for now. Poor thing! He has been hampered with debts ever since he came of age. The old Duke was a sad profligate, but a very charming man. What it is I do not pretend to define, and I say it without any snobbishness, for I am devoted to New York; but there is something about the English aristocracy——"

"Oh!"—Mr. Forbes rattled the shovel among the coals—"Do, please, spare me. You're all peer-bewitched, every one of you. Don't let us discuss the subject any farther. It is loathsome to me, and I am ashamed of my womankind."

"Are you determined to let Virginia sell her houses and jewels, Ned? It will break her heart."

"She knew what she was doing when she struck the bargain. It was an entirely voluntary act on her part. I see no reason why she should not stand the consequences. Shall we go in to dinner?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE next evening Miss Forbes dressed for a dinner party in a very bad humour.

Her mother was prostrated with a violent headache and had been obliged to send an excuse.

"Such a dreadful thing to do," grumbled Augusta to her maid as she revolved before the pier glass. "Have you asked Marie the particulars? Is my mother really ill?"

"Dreadful, I believe, miss."

"It makes me feel heartless to leave her, but one of us must go, that is certain. Can I see her?"

"No, miss. She is trying to sleep."

"People may have an idea that the path of an American heiress who is going to marry an English Duke is strewn with Jacqueminots; but I wish they knew what I have gone through in the last month. I wish to heaven papa would come over."

It was a bright and lively dinner given by a very young and newly-titled United Statesian, who treated the British peerage as a large and lovely joke, and was accepted on much the same footing. The Duke, who had pulled himself together since the swerve in his fortunes, looked something more of a man. His cheeks had more colour and his eye-belongings less. He held

himself erectly and talked well. Augusta bored him hideously, but he reflected that a Duke need see little of his Duchess, and filled his present *rôle* creditably. Fletcher Cuyler as usual was the life of the company, and even Augusta forgot to be intellectual.

A theatre party followed the dinner. Augusta returned to the hotel a little after midnight. As she opened the door of the private drawing-room of Mrs. Forbes' suite, she saw with surprise that her mother was sitting by one of the tables.

"I thought you were in bed with a headache," she began, and then uttered an exclamation of alarm and went hastily forward.

Mrs. Forbes, as white as the dead, her hair unbound and dishevelled, her eyes swollen, sat with clenched hands pressed hard against her cheeks.

"Mother!" exclaimed Augusta. "You—you look terribly. How you must have suffered. Has the pain gone?"

"Yes, the pain has gone."

"Well, I am glad you are better——"

"It will be a long while before I am better. Oh, I want your father! Cable to him! Go for him! Do anything, only bring him here."

"I'll cable this minute if you are really ill. But what is the matter?"

Mrs. Forbes muttered something. Augusta bent her ear. "What?" she asked. Her mother repeated what she had said. As Augusta lifted her head her face was scarlet.

"Gracious goodness!" she ejaculated. "Who would ever have thought of such a thing? She walked aim-

lessly to the window, then returned to her mother. "Well," she added, "it's nothing to be so upset about. It isn't as if it were your first. And papa will be delighted."

Mrs. Forbes flung her arms over the table, her head upon them, and burst into wild sobbing.

"Good heavens, mother, don't take on so," cried her daughter. "What good could papa do if he were here? I hope I'll never have a baby if it affects one like that."

She hovered over her mother, much embarrassed. She was not heartless and would have been glad to relieve her distress; but inasmuch as she was incapable of such distress herself she comprehended not the least of what possessed her mother. She took refuge upon the plane where she was ever at home.

"I have always said," she announced, "that it is not a good thing for American men to spoil their wives as they do, and particularly as papa spoils you. Here you are in the most ordinary predicament that can befall a woman, and yet you are utterly demoralised because he is not here to pet you and make you think you are the only woman that ever had a baby. And upon my word," she added reflectively, "I believe he would be perfectly happy if he were here. I can just see the fuss he would make over you——"

Here her mother's sobs became so violent that she was roused to genuine concern.

"I'll cable at once," she said. "But what shall I cable? I don't know how to intimate such a thing, and I certainly can't say it right out."

"I will write. Give me the things." Mrs. Forbes

raised her disfigured face and pushed back her hair. "It will make me feel better. Of course you cannot cable without alarming him, and he has had enough."

Augusta brought the writing materials with alacrity. Mrs. Forbes wrote two lines. The tears splashed on the paper.

"Those will look like real tears," said Augusta reassuringly. "Once I helped Mabel write a letter breaking off an engagement, and she sprinkled it with the hair-brush. I am sure he must have guessed. Here, I'll send it right away, and then you'll feel better."

She summoned a bell-boy and dispatched the letter. "There!" she said, patting her mother's head. "He'll be sure to come over now, and all will go as merry as a marriage-bell—my marriage-bell. Tell me, mamma, don't you feel that this is a special little intervention of Providence to bring things about just as we want them? Aren't you glad that this is the end of doubt and worry, and that you can keep your houses and lovely jewels?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Forbes wearily. "I want nothing but my husband."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE week passed. No cable came from Mr. Forbes. His wife did not admit further disquiet. She knew his pride. He would come, but not with the appearance of hastening to her at the first excuse.

She went out as much as she could—filled every moment. A part of the trousseau arrived, and there were many things to be bought in London.

She needed all the distraction she could devise. Impatience and longing, regret and loneliness crouched at the four corners of her mind, ready to spring the moment her will relaxed. The gloomy skies contributed their quota. She was home-sick for the blue and white, the electric atmosphere of New York. Nevertheless, when she was surrounded by admirers, during the hours wherein she was reminded that her haughty little head was among the stars, she was content, and had no thought of retreat.

The letter had left England on a Saturday. She reckoned that her husband would not receive it until the following Monday week. Making allowance for all delays, he could take the steamer that left New York on Wednesday.

On the Wednesday of the week succeeding she remained in her rooms all day. The time came and passed

for the arrival of passengers by the "Cunard" line; but her husband had a strong preference for the "American," and she had made up her mind not to expect him before a quarter to nine in the evening—a slight break in the *St. Paul's* machinery had delayed its arrival several hours.

She was nervous and excited. Augusta left the hotel and declared that she should not return until the "meeting was quite over." For the last week Mrs. Forbes had been haunted by visions of shipwreck, fire at sea, and sudden death. In these last hours she walked the floor torn by doubts of another nature. Suppose her husband would not forgive her, was disgusted, embittered? She had every reason to think that she had deep and intimate knowledge of him; but she knew that people had lived together for forty years before some crook of Circumstance had revealed the dormant but virile poison of their natures. Was bitter pride her husband's? For the first time she wished that she had never seen the Duke of Bosworth—retreated before the ambitions of a lifetime in detestation and terror. Every part of her concentrated into longing for the man who had made the happiness of her life. She even wished passionately that she had never had a daughter to come between them, and with curious feminism loved the baby that was coming the more.

She went to the mirror and regarded herself anxiously. When in society, excitement gave her all her old rich vital beauty, but the reaction left her pale and dull. Would he find her faded? He had worshipped her beauty, and she would rather have walked out from wealth into poverty than have discovered a wrinkle or a

grey hair. But she looked very lovely. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkling. Her warm soft hair when hanging always enriched her beauty. She wore an Empire gown of pale pink satin cut in a high square about the throat.

"Oh, I look pretty enough," she thought. "If he would only come!"

For the twentieth time she went to the clock. It was a few minutes to eight. The train was due at twenty minutes past. He should be at the hotel by a quarter to nine at latest.

The next hour was the longest of her life. She assured herself that if there was such a result as retributive justice in this world it beat upon her in a fiery rain during those crab-like moments. There was nothing to momentarily relieve the tension, no seconds of expectation, of hope. The roll of cabs in the street was incessant. The corridors of the hotel were so thickly carpeted that she could not hear a foot-fall. Her very hands shook, but she dared not take an anodyne lest she should not be herself when he came.

She tried to recall the few quarrels of her engagement and their perturbing effect. They were such pale wraiths before this agitation, following years of intense living, and quickened with the full knowledge of the great possession she may have tossed to Memory, that they dissolved upon evocation. She sprang to her feet again to pace the room. At that moment the door opened and her husband entered.

She had purposed to captivate him anew with her beauty, to shed several tears, perhaps, but not enough to blister and inflame. She flew across the room and

flung herself about his neck and deluged his face with tears, as she sobbed, and kissed him, and protested, and besought forgiveness.

His face had been stern as he entered. Although the appeal of her letter was irresistible, he had no intention of capitulating without reserves; but no man that loved a woman could be proof against such an outburst of feeling and affection, and in a moment he was pressing her in his arms and kissing her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE next morning Mr. Forbes had an interview with Augusta.

"I don't choose to discuss this matter of your engagement with your mother," he said, "so we will come to an understanding at once, if you please. Are you determined to marry this man, to take your mother's property in case I continue to refuse my consent?"

"Papa! What else can I do? The invitations are out. We should be the laughing-stock of two continents. Besides, I am convinced that Bertie is the one man I shall ever want to marry, and I cannot give him up."

"Very well. You and your mother have beaten me. Fortunately, you are better able to stand the consequences of your acts than most women. I doubt if you will ever realise them. I have an attorney here. He will confer with the Duke's attorneys to-morrow. Only, be good enough to arrange matters so that I shall see as little as possible of your Duke between now and the wedding. Your mother and I shall return to America the day after the ceremony."

As Mr. Forbes left the room Augusta thoughtfully arranged the chiffon on the front of her blouse.

"Even a big man," she reflected, "a great big man, a man who can make Presidents of the United States,

has no chance in the hands of two determined women. We are quite dangerous when we know our power."

She added after a moment:

"How gracefully he gave in. Dear papa! But that is the American of it. We never sulk. We lose our temper. We come down with both feet. We even kick hard and long when we want or don't want a thing badly. But when we find that it's all no use, I flatter myself that we know how to climb down."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE next two weeks flashed by. Besides the accumulating details there were two visits to country houses and a daily breakfast or dinner. Mr. Forbes, who had many friends in London, had no time to be bored. Mrs. Forbes was happy and triumphant. Augusta's serene components pleasurable oscillated.

The wedding was very brilliant, but not gorgeous. Mrs. Forbes was far too clever to give society and the press an excuse to sneer at the "vulgar display of American dollars." St. George's was decorated with sufficient lavishness to make it appear a bower of delight after the drive through rain and mud, but suggested to no mind the possible cost.

Royalty came from Cannes. The church was crowded to the doors with the best blood in England. The dowager duchess, a stout plainly-garbed old lady, sat with her daughters and grandchildren. She looked placid and rather sleepy. Mrs. Forbes, who was gowned in violet velvet with a point lace vest of new device, was flanked by her husband's relatives and the United States Embassy. Augusta, in a magnificent bridal robe of satin and lace and pearls, her severely-cut features softened by the white mist of her veil, looked stately and imposing. The maidens who flanked her were not

the friends of her youth, but their names were writ in the style of chivalry, and Augusta's equanimity was independent of sentiment. The Duke's bump of benevolence was on a level with her small well-placed ear, but he also looked his best.

As Mrs. Forbes listened to the words which affiliated her with several of the greatest houses in the history of Europe, she thrilled with gratified ambition and the more strictly feminine pleasure of having her own way. Suddenly her glance rested on her husband. He stood with his arms folded, his eyes lowered, an expression of bitter defeat on his face.

The blood dropped from her cheeks to her heart; the rosy atmosphere turned grey. "He says that he has forgiven me," she thought. "Has he? Has he? But I will make him! Any impressions can be effaced with time and persistence, and others that are ever present."

After the ceremony there was a breakfast at the Embassy. Only the members of the two families, the few intimate friends, and the bridesmaids were present. The company was barely seated when Fletcher Cuyler rose, leaned his finger tips lightly on the table and glanced about with his affable and impish grin.

"Ladies and gentlemen, your attention if you please," he commanded. "I wish the individually expressed thanks of each member of this assemblage. Not for being the happy instrument in bringing this auspicious marriage about—although I confess the imputation—but for a more immediate benefit, one which I have conferred equally upon each of you, and upon the many hundreds who were so fortunate as to witness the

ceremony which bound together two of the most distinguished families of America and Great Britain. I allude to the wedding-march. You doubtless noticed that it was played as it should be, as it rarely is. I have attended twenty-two weddings in St. George's——"

"Sit down, Fletcher," said the First Secretary impatiently. "What are you talking about? Do kindly take a back seat for once."

"On the contrary, I am entitled to a high chair in the front row. I played that march. You do not believe me? Ask the organist—when he is able to articulate. He is red-hot and speechless at present. I calmly approached him as he was pulling out his cuffs, and said: 'Young man (he is venerable, but I too am bald), 'move aside if you please. I am to play this wedding-march. The Duke of Bosworth is my particular friend. It is my way of giving him good luck. At once. There is the signal.' I fancy I hypnotised him. He slid off the stool mechanically. I lost no time taking his place. When he had recovered and was threatening police I was playing as even I had never played before. That is all."

Everybody laughed, the Duke more heartily than anyone. Fletcher was one of the few of life's gifts for which he was consistently thankful.

"You shall come with us to-day," he said, delighted with the sudden inspiration; and Fletcher, who had intended to go whether he was invited or not, graciously accepted.

The breakfast party was informal and gay. Toasts were given and the responses clever. Even Mr. Forbes,

who had no idea of being a death's head at a feast, forced himself into his best vein.

The Duke drank a good deal of wine and said little. He was, on the whole, well content. Mr. Forbes had handed over two hundred thousand pounds with which to repair Aire Castle, and settled the income of eight hundred thousand pounds on the young people, the principal to go to their children. The Duke reflected gratefully that he should have no cause to be ashamed of his bride. She was not beautiful, but even his relatives had approved of her manners and style. He forgave her for having bored him, for she had brought him a certain peace of mind; and she should have as many M.P.'s to talk political economy to as she (or they) listed. He would talk to Fletcher, and others.

Mrs. Forbes had her especial toasts. Even here, at this anti-climax dear to the heart of a bride, she was the personage. She looked regal and surpassing fair, for her eyes were very soft; and she had never been happier of speech. The Duke, who admired her with what enthusiasm was left in him, proposed a toast to which the Ambassador himself responded.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN it was over and Mr. Forbes and his wife had returned to the hotel, she put her hands on his shoulders and looked him in the eyes.

"Tell me," she said imperiously; "have you really forgiven me? I have almost been sure at times that you had. I have felt it. But you have not been quite your old dear self. I want to hear you say again that you forgive me, and it is the last time that I shall refer to the subject."

"Yes," he said, adjusting a lock that had fallen over her ear, "I have forgiven you, of course. We are to live the rest of our lives together. I am not so unwise, I hope, as to nurse offended pride and resentment."

The colour left her face. She came closer.

"Tell me!" she said, her voice vibrating. "Won't it ever be quite the same again? Is that what you mean?"

He took her in his arms and laid his cheek against hers. "Oh, I don't know," he said, "I don't know."

MRS. PENDLETON'S FOUR-IN-HAND.

MRS. PENDLETON'S FOUR-IN-HAND.

CHAPTER I.

JESSICA, her hands clenched and teeth set, stood looking with hard eyes at a small heap of letters lying on the floor. The sun, blazing through the open window, made her blink unconsciously, and the ocean's deep voice rising to the Newport sands seemed to reiterate—

“Contempt! Contempt!”

Tall, finely pointed with the indescribable air and style of the New York woman, she did not suggest intimate knowledge of the word the ocean hurled to her. In that mossgreen room, with her haughty face and clean skin, her severe faultless gown, she rather suggested the type to whom poets a century hence would indite their sonnets—when she and her kind had been set in the frame of the past. And if her dress was conventional, she had let imagination play with her hair. The clear evasive colour of flame, it was brushed down to her neck, parted, crossed, and brought tightly up each side of her head just behind her ears. Meeting above her bang, the curling ends allowed to fly loose, it vaguely

resembled Medusa's wreath. Her eyes were grey, the colour of mid-ocean, calm, beneath a grey sky. Not twenty-four, she had the repose and "air" of one whose cradle had been rocked by Society's foot; and although at this moment her pride was in the dust, there was more anger than shame in her face.

The door opened and her hostess entered. As Mrs. Pendleton turned slowly and looked at her, Miss Decker gave a little cry.

"Jessica!" she said, "what is the matter?"

"I have been insulted," said Mrs. Pendleton deliberately. She felt a savage pleasure in further humiliating herself.

"Insulted! You!" Miss Decker's correct voice and calm brown eyes could not have expressed more surprise and horror if a foreign diplomatist had snapped his fingers in the face of the President's wife. Even her sleek brown hair almost quivered.

"Yes," Mrs. Pendleton went on in the same measured tones; "four men have told me how much they despise me." She walked slowly up and down the room. Miss Decker sank upon the divan, incredulity, curiosity, expectation, feminine satisfaction marching across her face in rapid procession.

"I have always maintained that a married woman has a perfect right to flirt," continued Mrs. Pendleton. "The more if she has married an old man and life is somewhat of a bore. 'Why do you marry an old man?' snaps the virtuous world. 'What a contemptible creature you are to marry for anything but love!' it cries, as it eats the dust at Mammon's feet. I married an old man because, with the wisdom of twenty, I had made up my

mind that I could never love and that position and wealth alone made up the sum of existence. I had more excuse than a girl who has been always poor, for I had never known the arithmetic of money until my father failed, the year before I married. People who have never known wealth do not realise the purely physical suffering of those inured to luxury and suddenly bereft of it: it makes no difference what one's will or strength of character is. So—I married Mr. Pendleton. So—I amused myself with other men. Mr. Pendleton gave me my head, because I kept clear of scandal: he knew my pride. Now, if I had spent my life demoralising myself and the society that received me, I could not be more bitterly punished. I suppose I deserve it. I suppose that the married flirt is just as poor and paltry and contemptible a creature as the moralist and the minister depict her. We measure morals by results. Therefore I hold to-day that it is the business of a lifetime to throw stones at the married flirt.”

“For Heaven’s sake,” cried Miss Decker, in a tone of exasperation, “stop moralising and tell me what has happened!”

“Do you remember Clarence Trent, Edward Dedham, John Severance, Norton Boswell?”

“Do I? Poor moths!”

“They were apparently devoted to me.”

Drily: “Apparently.”

“How long is it since Mr. Pendleton’s death?”

“About—he died on the sixteenth—why, yes, it was six months yesterday since he died.”

“Exactly. You see these four notes on the floor? They are four proposals—four proposals”—and she gave

a short hard laugh through lips whose red had suddenly faded—"from the four men I have just mentioned."

Miss Decker gasped. "Four proposals! Then what on earth are you angry about?"

Mrs. Pendleton's lip curled scornfully. She did not condescend to answer at once. "You are clever enough at times," she said coldly, after a moment. "It is odd you cannot grasp the very palpable fact that four proposals received on the same day, by the same mail, from four men who are each other's most intimate friends, can mean but one thing—a practical joke. Oh!" she cried, the jealously-mastered passion springing into her voice, "that is what infuriates me—more even than the insult—that they should think me such a fool as to be so easily deceived! O—h—h!"

"If I remember aright," ventured Miss Decker feebly, "the intimacy to which you allude was a thing of the past some time before you disappeared from the world. In fact, they were not on speaking terms."

"Oh, they have made it up long ago! Don't make any weak explanations, but tell me how to turn the tables on them. I would give my hair and wear a grey wig—my complexion and paint—to get even with them. And I will. But how? How?"

She paced up and down the room with nervous steps, glancing for inspiration from the delicate etchings on the walls to the divan that was like a moss bank, to the carpet that might have been a patch of forest green, and thence to the sparkling ocean. Miss Decker offered no suggestions. She had perfect faith in the genius of her friend.

Suddenly Mrs. Pendleton paused and turned to her

hostess. The red had come back to her curled mouth. Her eyes were luminous, as when the sun breaks through the grey sky and falls, dazzling, on the waters.

"I have it!" she said. "And a week from to-day—I will keep them in suspense that long—New York will have no corner small enough to hold them."

CHAPTER II.

THE hot September day was ten hours old. The office of the St. Christopher Club was still deserted but for a clerk who looked warm and sleepy. The postman had just left a heap of letters on his desk, and he was sorting them for their various pigeon-holes. A young man entered, and the clerk began to turn over the letters more rapidly. The new-comer, tall, thin, with sharp features and shrewd American face, had an extremely nervous manner. As he passed through the vestibule a clerk at a table put a mark opposite the name "Mr. Clarence Trent," to indicate that he was in the Club.

"Any letters?" he demanded of the office clerk.

The man handed him two, and he darted into the morning-room and tore one open, letting the other fall to the floor. He read as follows:—

"MON AMI!—I have but this moment received your letter, which seems to have been delayed. ["Of course! Why did I not think of that?"] I say nothing here of the happiness which its contents have given me. Come at once.

"JESSICA PENDLETON.

"Our engagement must be a profound secret until the year of my mourning is over."

Trent's drab and scanty whiskers seemed to curl into hard knots over the nervous facial contortion in which he indulged. Nature being out of material when at work upon him had seemingly constructed his muscles from stout twine. An inch of it joining his nose to the upper lip, the former's pointed tip was wont to punctuate his conversation and emotions with the direct downward movement of a machine needle puncturing cloth. He crumpled the letter in his bony nervous fingers, and his pale, sharp, grey eyes opened and shut with sudden rapidity.

"I knew I could not be mistaken," he thought triumphantly. "She is mine!"

In the vestibule another name was checked off—"Mr. Norton Boswell"—and its owner made eagerly for the desk. His dark intellectual face was flushed, and his sensitive mouth twitched suddenly as the clerk handed him a roll of MSS.

"Never mind that," he said hastily. "Give me my letters."

The clerk handed him several, and, whisking them from left to right through his impatient hands, he thrust all but one into his pocket and walked rapidly to the morning-room. Seating himself before a table, he looked at the envelope as if not daring to solve its mystery, then hastily tore it apart.

"MON AMI—[Boswell, despite his ardour, threw a glance down a certain corridor in his memory and thought with kindling eyes: "Oh! with what divine sweetness did she use to utter those two little words!" Then he fixed his eyes greedily on the page once more.] I have but

this moment received your letter, which seems to have been delayed. ["Ah!" rapturously, the paper dancing before his eyes, "that accounts for it. I knew she was the most tender-hearted creature on earth."] I say nothing here of the happiness which its contents have given me. Come at once.

"JESSICA PENDLETON.

"Our engagement must be a profound secret until the year of my mourning is over."

Boswell, with quivering nostrils, plunged a pen into the ink-well, and in that quiet room two hearts thumped so loudly that only passion and scratching pens averted mutual and withering contempt.

As Boswell left the office a very young man entered it. He possessed that nondescript blond complexion which seems to be the uniform of the New York youth of fashion. The ciphers of the Four Hundred have achieved the well-scrubbed appearance of the Anglo-Saxon more successfully than his accent. Mr. Dedham might have been put through a clothes-wringer. Even his minute and recent moustache looked as if each hair had its particular nurse, and his pink and chubby face defied conscientious dissipation. He sauntered up to the clerk's desk with an elaborate affectation of indifference, and drawled a demand for his mail.

The clerk handed him a dainty note sealed with a crest. He accepted it with an absent air, although a look of genuine boyish delight thrust its way through the fishy inertness of his average expression.

It took him a minute and a half to get into the morning-room and read these fateful lines;—

"MON AMI—["Enchanting phrase! I can hear her say it."] I have but this moment received your letter, which seems to have been delayed. ["Ah! this perfume! this perfume!"] I say nothing here of the happiness which its contents have given me. Come at once.

"JESSICA PENDLETON.

"Our engagement must be a profound secret until the year of my mourning is over."

A rosy tide wandered to the roots of Mr. Dedham's ashen locks, and he made a wild uncertain dab at his upper lip. Again there was no sound in the morning-room of the St. Christopher Club but the furious dashing of pens, the rending of parchment paper, the sudden scraping of a nervous foot.

A tall broad-shouldered young man, with much repose of face and manner, entered the office from the avenue, glanced at the pigeon-holes above the clerk's desk, then sauntered deliberately into the morning-room and looked out of the window. A slight rigidity of the nostrils alone betokened the impatience within, and his uneasy thoughts ran somewhat as follows:—

"What a fool I have been! After all my experience with women to make such an ass of myself over the veriest coquette that ever breathed; but her preference for me last winter was so pointed—oh, damnation!"

He stood gnawing his under lip at the lumbering 'bus, but turned suddenly as a man approached from behind and presented several letters on a tray. The first and only one he opened ran thus;—

"MON AMI!—I have but this moment received your letter, which seems to have been delayed. I say nothing here of the happiness which its contents have given me. Come at once.

"JESSICA PENDLETON.

"Our engagement must be a profound secret until the year of my mourning is over."

Severance folded the note, his face paling a little.

"Well, well, she is true after all. What a brute I was to misjudge her!" He strolled back to the office. "I will go home and write to her, and to-morrow I shall see her! Great Heaven! Were six months ever so long before?"

As he turned from the coat-room Boswell entered the office by the opposite door.

"The fellow looks as gay as a lark," he thought. "He hasn't looked like that for six months. I believe I'll make it up with him—particularly as I've come out ahead!"

"Give me that package," demanded Boswell dreamily of the clerk. Then he caught sight of Severance. "Why, Jack, old fellow!" he cried, "how are you? Haven't seen you looking so well for an age. Don't go out. It's too hot."

"Oh, hang it! I've got to. I'm off for Newport to-morrow. It's so infernally dull in town."

"Going to Newport to-morrow! So am I. My aunt is quite ill and has sent for me. I'm her heir, you know."

"No? Didn't know you had an aunt. I congratulate you. Hope she'll go off, I'm sure."

"Hope so. Here comes Teddy—looks like an elon-

gated rubber ball. It's some time since I've seen him so buoyant. How are you, Teddy?"

"How are you, Norton, old boy?" explained Dedham rapturously. "How glad I am to hear the old name once more! You've given me the cold shoulder of late."

"Oh well, my boy, you know men will be fools occasionally. But give bygones the go-by. I'm going to Newport to-morrow. Can I take any messages to your numerous——"

"Dear boy! I'm going to Newport to-morrow. Sea-bathing ordered by my physician."

"Jove! I am in luck! Severance is going over too. We'll have a jolly time of it."

"I should say so!" murmured Teddy. "Heaven! Hello, Sev, how are you? Didn't see you. As long as we are all going the same way we might as well bury our hatchet. What do you say, dear boy?"

"Only too happy," said Severance heartily. "And may we never unearth it again. Here comes Trent. He looks as as if he had just been returned for the Senate."

"How are you?" demanded Trent peremptorily. "You have made it up? Don't leave me out in the cold."

Dedham made a final lunge for his deserting dignity, then sent it on its way. "I should think not," he cried, with dancing eyes. "Give me your fist."

In a moment they were all shaking each other's hands off, and good-fellowship was streaming from every eye.

"Come over to my rooms, all of you," gurgled Teddy, "and have a drink."

"With pleasure, my boy," said Trent. "But native rudeness will compel me to drink and run. I am off for Newport——"

"Newport!" cried three voices.

"Yes; anything strange in that? I'm going on vital business connected with the coming election."

"This is a coincidence!" exclaimed Boswell, with the appreciation of the romanticist. "Why, we are all going to Newport. Dedham in search of health, Severance of pleasure, and I of a fortune—only the old mummy is always making out her cheques, but never passes them in. Well, I hope we'll see a lot of each other when we get there."

"Oh, of course," said Severance hastily. "We will have many another game of polo together."

"Well," said Dedham, "come over to my rooms now and drink to the success of our separate quests."

CHAPTER III.

MISS DECKER paced restlessly up and down the sea-room waiting for the mail. Mrs. Pendleton, more composed but equally nervous, lay in a long chair, with expectation in her eyes and triumph on her lips.

"Will they answer or will they not?" exclaimed Miss Decker. "If the mail would only come! Will they be crushed?—furious?—or—will they apologise?"

"I care nothing what they do," said Mrs. Pendleton languidly. "All I wanted was to see them when they received my notes, and later when they met to compare them. I hold that my revenge is a masterpiece—to turn the joke on them and to let them see that they could not make a fool of me at the same time! Oh! how dared they?"

"Well, they'll never perpetrate another practical joke, my dear. You have your revenge, Jessica; you have blunted their sense of humour for life. I doubt if they ever even read the funny page of a newspaper again. Here comes the postman. There! the bell has rung. Why doesn't Hart go? I'll go myself in a minute."

Mrs. Pendleton's nostrils dilated a little, but she did not turn her head even when the manservant entered and held a silver tray before her.

Four letters lay thereon. She placed them on her

lap, but did not speak until the man had left the room. Then she looked at Miss Decker and gave the letters a little sweep with the tips of her fingers.

"They have answered," she said.

"Oh, Jessica, for Heaven's sake don't be so iron-bound!" cried her friend. "Read them."

"You can read them if you choose. I have no interest beyond knowing they received mine."

Miss Decker needed no second invitation. She caught the letters from Mrs. Pendleton's lap and tore one of them open. She read a few lines, then dropped limply on a chair.

"Jessica!" she whispered, with a little agonised gasp, "listen to this."

Mrs. Pendleton turned her eyes inquiringly, but would not stoop to curiosity. "Well," she said, "I am listening."

"It is from Mr. Trent. And—listen:—

"'ANGEL!—I think if you had kept me waiting one day longer you would have met a lunatic wandering on the Newport cliffs. Last night I attended a primary and made such an egregious idiot of myself (although I was complimented later upon my speech) that I shall never understand why I was not hissed. But hereafter I shall be inspired. And how you will shine in Washington! That is the place for our talents. After reading your reserved yet impassioned note, I do not feel that I can talk more rationally upon politics than while in suspense. What do you think I did? I made it all up with Severance, Dedham, and Boswell, whom I met just after receiving it. I could afford to forgive them. They, by

the way, go to Newport to-morrow. Farewell, most brilliant of women, destined by Heaven to be the wife of a diplomatist—for I will confide to you that that is my ultimate ambition. Until to-morrow,

“‘CLARENCE TRENT.’”

“Well! What do you think of that?”

A pink wave had risen to Mrs. Pendleton's hair, then receded and broken upon the haughty curve of her mouth.

“Read the others,” she said briefly.

“Oh! how can you be so cool?” and Miss Decker opened another note with trembling fingers.

“It is from Norton Boswell:—

“‘You once chided me for looking at the world through grey spectacles, and bade me always hope for the best until the worst was decided. When you were near to encourage me the sky was often pink, but even the memory of the last six months has faded before the agonised suspense of these seven days. Oh! I shall be an author now, if suffering is the final lesson. But what incoherent stuff I am writing! Loneliness and despair are alike forgotten. I can write no more! To-morrow! To-morrow!’

“‘BOSWELL.’”

“Read Severance's,” said Jessica quickly.

“I believe you like that man!” exclaimed Miss Decker. “I think he's a brute. But you're in a scrape. This is from the lordly Severance:—

“‘An Englishman once said of you, with a drawl which wound the words about my memory—“Y-a-a-s; she flirts on ice, so to speak.” Coldest and most subtle of women, why did you keep me in suspense for seven long days? Do you think I believe that fiction of the delayed letter? You forget that we have met before. But why torment me? Did I not in common decency have to wait six months before I dared put my fate to the test? How I counted those days! I had a calendar and a pencil—in short, I made a fool of myself. Now the chess-board is between us once more: we start on even ground; we will play a keen and close game to the end of our natural lives. I love you; but I know you. I will kiss the rod—until we marry; after that—we shall play chess. I shall see you to-morrow.

S.’”

“Well, that’s what I call a beast of a man,” said Miss Decker.

“I hate him!” said Jessica, between her teeth.

She looked hard at the ocean. Under its grey sky to-day it was the colour of her eyes, as cold and as unfathomable. The glittering Medusa-like ends of her hair seemed to leap upward and writhe at each other.

“I should think you would hate him,” said Miss Decker; “he is the only living man who ever got the best of you. But listen to what your devoted infant has to say. Nice little boy, Teddy:—

“‘DEAREST! SWEETEST!—Do you know that I am almost dancing for joy at this moment? Indeed, my feet

are going faster than my pen. To think! To think!—you really *do* love me after all. But I always said you were not a flirt. I knocked a man down once and challenged him to a duel because he said you were. He wouldn't fight, but I had the satisfaction of letting him know what I thought of him. And now I can prove it to all the world! But I can't write any more. There are three blots on this now—the pen is jumping, and you know I never was much at writing letters. But I can talk, and to-morrow I will tell you all.

“‘YOUR OWN TEDDY.

“‘*P.S.*—Is it not queer—quite a coincidence—Severance, Trent, and Boswell are going to Newport to-morrow too. How proud I shall be! But no, I take that back; I only pity them, poor devils, from the bottom of my heart; or I would if it wasn't filled up with you.

“‘T.’”

“Well, madam, you're in a scrape, and I don't envy you. What will you do?”

Mrs. Pendleton pressed her head against the back of the chair, straining her head upward as if she wanted the salt breeze to rasp her throat.

“I have been so bored for six months,” she said slowly. “Let them come. I will see each of them alone, and keep the farce going for a week or so. It will be amusing—to be engaged to four men at once. You will command the forces and see that they do not meet. Of course, it cannot be kept up very long, and when all resources are failing I will let them meet and make

them madly jealous. It will do one of them good, at least."

"Well, you have courage," ejaculated Miss Decker. "You can't do it. But yes, you can. If the woman lives who can play jackstraws with firebrands, that woman is you. And what fun! We are so dull here—both in mourning. I'll help you. I'll carry out your instructions like a major."

Mrs. Pendleton rose and walked up and down the room once or twice. "There is only one thing," she said, drawing her brows together: "if I am engaged to them they will want to—h'm—kiss me, you know. It will be rather awkward. I never was engaged to anyone but Mr. Pendleton, and he used to kiss me on my forehead and say, 'My dear child.' I am afraid they won't be contented with that."

"I am afraid they won't! But you have tact enough. Come, say you will do it."

"Yes," said Jessica, "I will do it. In my boarding-school days I used to dream of being a tragedy queen; I find myself thrust by circumstances into comedy. But I have no doubt it will suit my talents better."

CHAPTER IV.

SCENE I.

SEVERANCE strode impatiently up and down the room overlooking the ocean.

"'Will be down in a minute.' I suppose that means the usual thirty for reflection and contemplation of *bric-à-brac*. What a pretty room! No *bric-à-brac* in it, by the way. I wonder if this is the room my lady Jessica is said to have furnished to suit herself? It looks like a woodland glade. She must look stunning against those moss-green curtains. I wonder how madam liked my letter? It was rather brutal, but to manage a witch you have got to be Jove astride a high horse. Here she comes. I know that perfume. She uses it to sweeten the venom of those snakes of hers."

Mrs. Pendleton entered and gave him her hand with frank welcome. Her "snakes" seemed vibrant with life and defiance, and her individuality pierced through her white conventional gown like a solitary star in a hueless sky.

"How do you do?" she asked, shaking his hand warmly; then she sat down at once as a matter of course.

He understood the manœuvre.

"Let us play chess, by all means," he said, and

took a chair opposite. "Your seclusion has done you good," he added, smiling as the crest of a wave appeared in her eyes. "You have lost your fagged look and are more like a girl than a widow. Dissipation does not agree with you. Two more winters! You would try to make up for it by your wit, and then your nose would get sharp, and you would have a line down the middle of your forehead and another on each side of your mouth."

"You are as rude as ever," said Jessica coldly; but the wave in her eyes threatened to become tidal. "If you marry a blonde and incarcerate her, however, you may find the effect more bleaching than Society."

"Was that a reflection upon my own society? I do not incarcerate; I only warn."

"So do I," said Mrs. Pendleton significantly; "I have occasionally got the best of a bad bargain."

"And as you will find me the worst in the world you are already on the defensive," said Severance, with a laugh. "Come, I have not seen you for six months, and I am hard hit. I wrote you that I marked off each day with a pencil—a red one at that; I bought it for the occasion. Don't take a base advantage of the admission, but give me one kind syllable. I ask for it as humbly as a dog does for a bone."

"You do, indeed. I began by making disagreeable remarks about your personal appearance, did I not? If you will be a brute, I will be a—cat."

"You will acquit yourself with credit. But I will not quarrel with you to-day." He rose suddenly and went over to her, but she was already on her feet. She

dropped her eyes, then raised them appealingly; but the sea was level.

"Do not kiss me," she said.

"Why not?"

"I would rather not—yet. Do you know that I have never kissed a man—a lover, I mean—in my life? And this is so sudden—I would rather wait."

He raised her hand chivalrously to his lips. "I will wait," he said; "but you will wear my ring?" And he took a circlet from his pocket and slipped it on her finger.

"Thank you," she said simply, and touched it with a little caressing motion.

He dropped her hand and stepped back. Miss Decker had pushed aside the *portière*.

"How do you do, Mr. Severance?" she said cordially; "I did not interrupt even to congratulate, but to take Jessica away for a moment. My dear, your dressmaker came down on the train with Mr. Severance and has but a minute. You had better go at once, for you know her temper is not sweet."

"Provoking thing!" said Jessica, with a pout. It was the fourth mood to which she treated Severance in this short interview, and he looked at her with delight. "But I will get rid of her as soon as possible. Will you excuse me for a few moments? I will be back in ten."

"A dressmaker is the only tyrant to whom I bow, the only foe before whom I lay down my arms. Go; but come back soon."

"In ten minutes."

"Which is it, and where is he?" she whispered eagerly as they crossed the hall.

"Mr. Trent. He is in the library."

SCENE II.

Trent was standing before a bust of Daniel Webster, speculating upon how his own profile would look in bronze.

"You would have to shave off your side-whiskers," murmured a soft voice behind him.

He turned with a nervous start, and a suspicion of colour appeared under his grey skin. Mrs. Pendleton was standing with her hands resting lightly on the table. She smiled with saucy dignity—an art she had brought to perfection.

"I give you five years," she said.

"With you to help me," he cried enthusiastically. "Ah! I see you now, leaning on the arm of a foreign ambassador, going in to some great diplomatic dinner!"

"It is too bad, I shall have to take the arm of a small one; you will be but the American minister, you know. (Great Heaven! how determined he looks! I know he means to kiss me. If I can only keep his ambition going.)"

"I will be senator first, and pass a bill placing this country on an equal diplomatic footing with the proudest in Europe. You will then go to your embassy as the wife of an ambassador."

"I know you will accomplish it; and let it be Paris. I cannot endure to shop anywhere else."

"It shall be Paris."

"Are you not tired?" she asked hurriedly.

"Tired? I have not thought of fatigue."

"The day is so warm."

"I have not felt it. Jessica!"

"O—h—h—h!" and catching her face convulsively in her hand, she sank into a chair.

"What is it? What is it?" he cried, hopping about her like an agitated spider, the tip of his nose punctuating his excitement. "What can I do? Are you ill?"

Faintly: "Neuralgia."

"What shall I ring for? Antipyrine? Horse-radish for your wrists? Belladonna? What?"

"Nothing. Sit down and talk to me, and perhaps it will go away. Tell me something about yourself, and I'll forget it. Sit down."

"There is but little to tell. I have been busy making friends against the next election. I have addressed several meetings with great success. I have every chance for the House this time—for the senate next term. How's your face?"

"Misery! You said that several of my old friends came down with you. How odd!"

"Was it not?"

"I suppose they will all come to see me."

"H'm. I don't know. Doubt if they know you are here. I shall not tell them. They would only be coming to see you and getting in my way. I'll wait until our wedding-day approaches and ask them to be ushers. But now, Jessica, that you do not seem to suffer so acutely——"

"Oh! Oh! (Thank Heaven, I hear Edith.)"

Trent sprang to his feet in genuine alarm. "Dearest! let me go for the doctor. I cannot stand this——"

Miss Decker entered with apparent haste, spoke to Trent, then stopped abruptly.

"Jessica!" she cried. "What is the matter?"

"My face! You know how I have suffered—worse than ever."

"Oh, you poor dear! She is such a martyr, Mr. Trent, with that tooth——"

"Neuralgia!"

"I mean neuralgia! She was up all night. But, my dear, don't think me a heartless fiend, but you must see your lawyer. He is here with those deeds for you to sign, and he says that he must catch the train."

"That estate has given me so much trouble," murmured Mrs. Pendleton wretchedly; "and how can I talk business when my head is on the rack? I do not wish to leave Mr. Trent so soon, either."

"Leave Mr. Trent to me. I will entertain him. I will talk to him about you."

"May I speak to you one moment before you go?" asked Trent.

"Yes," pinching her lips with extremest pain, "you need not mind Edith."

"Not in the least." He took a box from his pocket with an air of resignation which boded well for the trials of a diplomatic career. "I cannot wait longer to fetter you. You told me once that the emerald was your favourite stone."

She relaxed her lips and swept her lashes down and up rapturously. "So good of you to remember," she murmured; "it reminds me of mermaids and things, and I love it."

"You were always so poetical! But where did you get that ring? I thought you never wore rings. On your engagement-finger, too!"

"It was a present from grandma, and I wear it to please her. I'll slip it in my pocket now—it is too large for any other finger—and you can put yours where it belongs."

"You will never take it off until you need its place for your wedding-ring?"

"Never!"

"Angel! And your face is better?"

"Yes; but Edith is looking directly this way."

SCENE III.

Mrs. Pendleton entered the drawing-room on tiptoe, with hand upraised.

"Well! the sky did not fall, and the train did not ditch, and the lightning did not strike, and we are neither of us dead. And you—you look as strapping as a West Point cadet. Fie upon your principles!"

"That is a charming tirade with which to greet an impatient lover," cried Boswell, with beaming face. "You are serious, of course?"

"You have heard the parable of a woman's 'No'?" She gave both his outstretched hands a little shake, then retreated behind a chair and rested both arms on its back.

"My anger is appeased, but I think I am entitled to some recompense."

"(What can he mean?) Would you prefer sherry or red wine?"

"There is a draught brewed upon Olympus which the gods call nectar——"

"So sorry. We are just out. I gave the last thimbleful away an hour ago."

"Oh, you did! May I inquire to whom you gave it?"

"You may, indeed. And I would tell you—could I only remember."

"Provoking—goddess! But perhaps you will allow me to look for myself. Perchance I might find a drop or two remaining. I am willing to take what I can get and be thankful."

"Then you will never get much," she thought. "The dregs are always bitter."

"There can be no dregs to the nectar in question."

"And the last drop always goes to the head. I have heard it asserted upon authority. Think of the scandal—the butler—oh, Heaven!"

"The intoxication would make me but tread the air. I should walk right over the butler's head. Where did you get that ring?"

"Is it not lovely? It was" (heaving a profound sigh) "the last gift of poor dear Mr. Pendleton."

"Indeed! Well, under the circumstances, perhaps you will not mind removing it and wearing that of another unfortunate," and he placed one knee on the chair over which she leaned and produced a ring.

"Not at all. What a beauty! How did you know that the ruby was my favourite stone?" And she bent her body backward, under pretence of holding the stone up to the light.

"But you have a number of rubies and pearls in your possession, of which I consider myself the rightful owner. Shall I have to call in the law to give me mine own?"

"The pearls are sharp, and the rubies may be paste. I have the best of the bargain."

"I am a connoisseur on the subject of precious stones—of precious articles of all sorts, in fact. What an outrageous coquette you are! What is the use of keeping a man in misery?"

"Why are men always in such a hurry? If I were a man now—and an author—I should wait for moonlight, waves breaking on rocks, and all the rest of it."

"All the old property business, in short. I am both a man and an author, therefore I know the folly of delay in this short life."

"But suppose the door should open suddenly?"

"I have been here ten minutes, and it has not opened yet."

"But it might, you know; and the small boys of this house are an exaggeration of all that have gone before. Ah! here comes someone. Sit down on that chair instantly."

Miss Decker entered and looked deprecatingly at Boswell.

"You have come at last," she said. "We were afraid something had happened to you. I cannot help this interruption, Jessica. Your grandmother is here and wants to see you immediately. She has been telegraphed for to go to Philadelphia; Mrs. Armstrong is very ill. I would not keep her waiting."

"Poor grandma! To think of her being obliged to go to Philadelphia in September. Where is she?"

"In the yellow reception-room. Mr. Boswell will excuse you for a few minutes."

Boswell bowed, his face stamped with gloom.

"What have you done with the others?" asked Jessica, as she closed the door.

"Mr. Severance is storming up and down the sea-room. Mr. Trent is like a caged lion in the library; I expect to hear a crash every minute. But both know what lawyers and dressmakers mean. Boswell will learn something of grandmothers. But they are safe for a quarter of an hour longer. Trust all to me."

SCENE IV.

Dedham was sitting on the edge of one of the reception-room chairs, locking and unlocking his fingers until his hands were as red as those of a son of toil. He was nervous, happy, terrified, annoyed.

"That beastly porter to keep me waiting so long for my portmanteau!" he almost cried aloud. "What must she think of me?"

"You wicked boy!" said a voice of gentle reproach. "What made you so late? I was just about to send and inquire if anything had happened to you. But sit down. How tired you must be! Would you like a glass of sherry and a biscuit?"

"Nothing! Nothing! You know, it's not my fault that I'm late. My portmanteau got mislaid and my travelling clothes were so dusty. And you really are glad to see me?"

"What a question! It makes me feel young again to see you."

"Young again! You!"

"I am twenty-four, Teddy, and a widow," and she shook her head sadly. "I feel fearfully old—like your

mother. I have had so much care and responsibility in my life, and you are so careless and debonair."

"You'll make me cry in a minute," said Teddy; "and I wish you wouldn't talk like that. You seem to put a whole Adirondack between us."

"I can't help it. Perhaps I'll get over it after a time. It's so sad being mewed up six whole months!"

"Then marry me right off. That's just the point. We'll go and travel and have a jolly good time. That'll brace you up and make you feel as young as you look."

"I can't, Teddy. I must wait a year in common decency. Think how people would talk."

"Let 'em. They'll soon find something else and forget us. Marry me next month."

"Next month—well——"

"It would be rather fun to be the hero and heroine of a sensation, anyhow. That's what everybody's after. You're just a nonentity until you've been blackguarded in the papers. Whose ring is that?"

"One of Edith's. I put it on to remember something by."

"Well, take it off and wear this instead. It'll help your memory just as well."

"What, a solitaire!"

"I knew you would prefer it. I know all your tastes by instinct."

"You do, Teddy. Coloured stones are so tiresome."

"By the way, I think your old admirer, Severance, must be about to put himself in silken fetters, as Boswell would say. I caught him buying an unusually fine sapphire in Tiffany's yesterday. Said it was for his sister. H'm—h'm."

"Ah! I wonder who it can be?"

"Don't know. Hasn't looked at a woman since you left. But I have a strong suspicion that it is someone here in Newport."

"Here! I wonder if it can be Edith?"

"Miss Decker? Sure enough. Never seemed to pay her much attention, though. She's not my style; too much like sixteen dozen other New York girls."

He buttoned up his coat, braced himself against it, and gave his moustache a frantic twist.

"Mrs.—Jessica!" he ejaculated desperately, "you are engaged to me—won't you—won't you——"

She drew herself up and glanced down upon him from her higher chair with a look of sad disapproval.

"I did not think it of you, Teddy," she said. "And it is one of the things of which I have never approved."

"But why not?" asked Teddy feebly.

"I thought you knew me better than to ask such a question."

"I know you are an angel—oh, hang it! You do make me feel as if you *were* my mother."

"Now, don't be unreasonable, or I shall believe that you are a tyrant."

"A tyrant? I? Horri—no, I wish I was. What a model of propriety you are! I never should have thought it—I mean—darling! you were always such a coquette, you know. Not that I ever thought so. You know I never did—oh, hang it all—but if I let you have your own way in this unreasonable—I mean this perfectly natural whim—you might at least promise to marry me in a month. And, indeed, I think that if you are an angel, I am a saint."

"Well, on one condition."

"Any! Any!"

"It must be an absolute secret until the wedding is over. I hate congratulations, and if we are going to have a sensation we might as well have a good concentrated one."

"I agree with you, and I'll never find fault with you again. You——"

Miss Decker almost ran into the room.

"Jessica!" she cried. "Oh, dear Mr. Dedham, how are you? Jessica, mother has one of her terrible attacks, and I must ask you to stay with her while I go for the doctor myself. I cannot trust servants."

"Let me go! let me go!" cried Teddy. "I'll bring him back in a quarter of an hour. Who shall——"

"Coleman. He lives——"

"I know. Au revoir!" And the girls were alone.

"There!" exclaimed Miss Decker, "we have got rid of him. Now for the others. You slip upstairs, and I'll dispose of them one by one. You are taken suddenly ill. Teddy will not be back for an hour. Dr. Coleman has moved."

CHAPTER V.

A LAMP burned in the sea-room, and the two girls were sitting in their evening gowns before a bright log fire. Miss Decker was in white this time—an elaborate French concoction of embroidered muslin which made her look like an expensive fashion-plate. Jessica wore a low-cut black *crêpe*, above which she rose like carved ivory and brass. The snakes to-night were held in place by diamond hair-pins that glittered like baleful eyes. In her lap sparkled four rings.

“What shall I do?” she exclaimed. “If my life depended upon it, I could not remember who gave me which.”

“Let us think. What sort of a stone would a politician be most likely to choose?”

Mrs. Pendleton laughed. “A good idea. If *couleur de rose* be synonymous with conceit, then I think the ruby must have come from Mr. Trent.”

“I am sure of it. And as your author is always in the dumps, I am certain he takes naturally to the sapphire.”

“But the emerald——”

“Is emblematic of your deluded Teddy. The solitaire therefore falls naturally to Mr. Severance. Well, now that you have got through the first interviews in safety, what are you going to do next?”

"Edith, I do not know. They are all so dreadfully in earnest that I believe I shall finally take to my heels in downright terror. But no, I won't. I'll come out of it with the upper hand and save my reputation as an actress. I will keep it up for two or three days more, but after that it will be impossible. They are bound to meet here sooner or later. Thank Heaven, we are rid of them for to-night, at least!"

The manservant threw back the *portière*.

"Mr. Trent!"

"Heavens!" cried Edith, under her breath; "I forgot to give orders that we were not receiv— How do you do, Mr. Trent?"

"And which is his ring?" Jessica made a frenzied dab at the jewels in her lap. She slipped the sapphire on her finger and hid the others under a cushion. Trent, who had been detained a moment by Miss Decker, advanced to her.

"It is very soon to come again," he said, "but I simply had to call and inquire if you felt better. I am delighted to see that you apparently do."

"I am better, thank you." Her voice was weak. "It was good of you to come again."

"Whose ring is that?"

"Why—a—to—sure——"

"Jessica!" cried Miss Decker, "have you gone off with my ring again? You are so absent-minded! I hunted for that ring high and low!"

"You should not be so good-natured, and my memory would turn over a new leaf. Here, take it." She tossed the ring to Miss Decker and raised her eyes guiltily to Trent's. "Shall I go up and get the other?"

"No. But I thought you promised never to take it off."

"I forgot that water ruins stones."

"Well, it is a consolation to know that water does not ruin a certain plain gold circlet."

"Mr. Boswell!"

Jessica gasped and looked at the flames. A crisis had come. Would she be clever enough! Then the situation stimulated her. She held out her hand to Boswell.

"You have come to see me?" she cried delightedly. "Mr. Trent has just been telling us that you came down with him, and I hoped you would call soon."

"Yes, to be sure—to be sure. You might have known I would call soon." He bowed stiffly to Trent, and, seating himself close beside Jessica, murmured in her ear: "Cannot you get rid of that fellow? How did he find you out so soon?"

"Why, he came to see Edith, of course. Do you not remember how devoted he always was to her?"

"I do not——"

"May I ask what you are whispering about, Mr. Boswell?" demanded Trent, breaking from Miss Decker. "Is he confiding to you the astounding success of his last novel, Mrs. Pendleton? Or was it a history of the United States? I really forget."

"Not the last, certainly. I leave it to you to make history—an abridged edition. My ambition is a more humble one."

"Oh, you will both need biographers," said Mrs. Pendleton, who was beginning to enjoy herself. "I will give you an idea. Join the Theosophists. Arrange for

reincarnation. Come back in the next generation and write your own biographies. Then your friends and families cannot complain you have not had justice done you."

"Ha! ha!" said Trent.

"You are as cruel as ever," said Boswell, with a sigh. "Where is my ring?" he whispered.

"It was so large that I could not keep it on. I must have a guard made."

"Dear little fingers——"

"You may never have been taught when you were a small boy, Mr. Boswell," interrupted Trent, "that it is rude to whisper in company. Therefore, to save your manners in Mrs. Pendleton's eyes, I will do you the kindness to prevent further lapse." And he seated himself on the other side of Jessica and glared defiantly at Boswell.

"Mr. Severance and Mr. Dedham!"

Severance entered hurriedly. "I am so glad to hear —ah, Boswell! Trent!"

"How odd that you should all find your way here the very first evening of your arrival!" And Jessica held out her hand with a placid smile. Miss Decker was more nervous, but five seasons were behind her. "Ah!" continued Mrs. Pendleton, "and Mr. Dedham, too! This is a most charming reunion!"

"Charming beyond expression!" said Severance.

Trent and Boswell being obliged to rise when Miss Decker went forward to meet the new-comers, Severance took the former's chair, Dedham that of the future statesman.

"You are better?" whispered Severance. "I have been anxious."

"Oh, I have been worried to death!" murmured Teddy in her other ear. "That wretched doctor had not only moved but gone out of town; and when I came back at last and found——"

"Mr. Severance," exclaimed Trent, "you have my chair."

"Is this your chair? You have good taste. A remarkably comfortable chair."

"You would oblige me——"

"By keeping it? Certainly. You were ever generous, but that I believe is a characteristic of genius."

"Mrs. Pendleton," said Boswell plaintively, "as Mr. Dedham has taken my chair, I will take this stool at your feet."

Trent was obliged to lean his elbow on the mantelpiece, for want of a better view of Mrs. Pendleton, and Miss Decker sat on the other side of Dedham.

"How are you, Teddy?" she said.

"Young and happy. You must let me congratulate you."

"For what?"

"I see you wear Severance's ring. Ah, Sev, did the ring suit your sister?"

"To a T. Said it was her favourite stone." He stopped abruptly. "What the deuce——" below his breath; and Jessica whispered hurriedly:

"Edith was looking at it when Mr. Trent came in, and forgot to return it."

"Ah! Boswell, I am sure you are sitting on Mrs. Pendleton's foot. By the way, how is your aunt?"

"Dead—better."

"I wonder you could tear yourself away so soon,"

said Trent viciously. "You'd better be careful. She might make a new will."

"Don't worry. I spent the happiest fifteen minutes of my life with her this afternoon. She promised me all." He turned to Severance. "You have been breaking hearts on the beach, I suppose."

"Which is better, at all events, than breaking one's head against a stone wall."

"Politics brought you here, I suppose, Mr. Trent," interrupted Miss Decker. "I hear you made a stirring speech the other night."

"I did. It was on the question of Radicalism in the Press *versus* Civil Service Reform. Something must be done to revolutionise this hotbed of iniquity, American politics. Such principles need courage, but when the hour comes the man must not be wanting——"

"That was all in the paper next morning," drawled Boswell. "Mrs. Pendleton, did you receive the copy of my new book I sent a fortnight ago? Unlike many of my others, I had no difficulty in disposing of it. It was lighter, brighter, less philosophy, less—brains. The critics understood it, therefore they were kind. They even said——"

"Don't quote the critics, for Heaven's sake," said Severance. "It is enough to have read them."

"Oh, Mrs. Pendleton," exclaimed Teddy, "if you could have been at the yacht race! Such excitement, such——"

"To change the subject," said Trent, with determination in his eye, "Mrs. Pendleton, did you receive all the marked papers I sent you containing my speeches, especially the one on Jesuitism in Politics?"

"Don't bother Mrs. Pendleton with politics!" exclaimed Boswell, whose own egotism was kicking against its bars. "You did not think my book too long, did you? One purblind critic said——"

"Good-night, Mrs. Pendleton," said Severance, rising abruptly. "Good evening," and he bowed to Miss Decker and to the men. Jessica rose suddenly and went with him to the door.

"I am going to walk on the cliffs—'Forty Steps'—at eleven to-morrow," she said, as she gave him her hand. "This may be unconventional, but *I* choose to do it."

He bowed over her hand. "Mrs. Pendleton will only have set one more fashion," he said. "I shall be there."

As he left the room by one door, Jessica crossed the room and opened another.

"Good-night," she said to the astounded company, and withdrew.

CHAPTER VI.

SEVERANCE sauntered up and down the "Forty Steps," the repose of his bearing belying the agitation within.

"Why on earth doesn't she come?" he thought uneasily. "Can she be ill again? She is ten minutes behind time now. What did it mean—all those fellows there last night? She looked like an amused spectator at a play, and Miss Decker was nervous, actually nervous. Damn it! Here they all come. What do they mean by keeping under my heels like this?"

Dedham, Trent, and Boswell strolled up from various directions, and, although each had expectation in his eye, none looked overjoyed to see the other men. There were four cold nods, a dead pause, and then Teddy gave a little cough.

"Beautiful after—I mean morning."

"It is indeed," said Severance. "I wonder you are not taking your salt-water constitutional."

"I always take a walk in the morning;" and Teddy glanced nervously over his shoulder.

Boswell and Trent, each with a little missive burning his pocket, turned red, fidgeted, glared at the ocean, and made no remark. Severance darted a glance at each of the three in succession, and then looked at the ground with a contemplative stare. At this moment Mrs. Pendleton appeared.

Three of the men advanced to meet her with an awkward attempt at surprise, but she waved them back.

"I have something to say to you," she said.

The cold languor of her face had given place to an expression of haughty triumph. A gleam of conscious power lay deep in her scornful eyes. The final act in the drama had come, and the *dénouement* should be worthy of her talents. She looked like a judge who had smiled encouragement to a guilty defendant only to confer the sentence of capital punishment at last.

"Gentlemen," she said, and even her voice was judicatorial, "I have asked you all to meet me here this morning"—(three angry starts, but she went on unmoved)—"because I came to the conclusion last night that it is quite time this farce should end. I am somewhat bored myself, and I have no doubt you are so, as well. Your joke was a clever one, worthy of the idle days of autumn. When I received your four proposals by the same mail, I appreciated your wit—I will say more, your genius—and felt glad to do anything I could to contribute to your amusement, especially as all the world is away and I knew how dull you must be. So I accepted each of you, as you know, had four charming interviews and one memorable one of a more composite nature; and now that we have all agreed that the spicy and original little drama has run its length, I take pleasure in restoring your rings."

She took from her handkerchief a beautiful little casket of blue onyx, upon which reposed the Pendleton crest in diamonds, touched a spring, and revealed four rings sparkling about as many velvet cushions. The

four men stood speechless; not one dared protest his sincerity and see ridicule in the eyes of his neighbour.

Mrs. Pendleton dropped her judicial air, and taking the ruby between her fingers, smiled like a teacher bestowing a prize.

"Mr. Boswell," she said, "I believe this belongs to you;" and she handed the ring to the stupefied author. He put it in his pocket with never a word.

She raised the emerald. "Mr. Trent, this is yours?—or is it the sapphire?"

"The emerald," snorted Trent.

She dropped it in his nerveless palm with a gracious bend of the head, and turned to Teddy.

"You gave me a solitaire, I remember," she said sweetly. "A most appropriate gift, for it is the ideal life."

Teddy looked as if about to burst into tears, gave her one beseeching glance, then took his ring and strode feebly over the cliffs. Trent and Boswell hesitated a moment, then hurried after.

Jessica held the casket to Severance, with a little outward sweep of her wrist. He took it and, folding his arms, looked at her steadily. A tide of angry colour rose to her hair, then she turned her back upon him and, looking out over the water, tapped her foot on the rocks.

"Why do you not go?" she asked. "I hate you more than anyone on earth."

"No. You love me."

"I hate you! You are a brute! The coolest, the rudest, the most exasperating man on—on earth."

"That is the reason you love me. My dear Mrs.

Pendleton," he continued, taking the ring from the casket and laying the latter on a rock, "a woman of brains and headstrong will—but unegoistic—likes a brutal and masterful man. An egoistical woman, whether she be fool or brilliant, likes a slave. The reason is that egoism, not being a feminine quality primarily, but borrowed from man, places its fair possessor outside of her sex's limitations, and supplies her with the satisfying simulacrum of those stronger characteristics which she would otherwise look for in man. You are not an egoist."

He took her hand and removed her glove in spite of her resistance.

"Don't struggle. You would only look ridiculous if anyone should pass. Besides, it is useless. I am so much stronger. I do not know or care what really possessed you to indulge in such a freak as to engage yourself to four men at once," he continued, slipping the ring on her finger. "You had your joke, and I hope you enjoyed it. The *dénouement* was highly dramatic. As I said, I desire no explanation, for I am never concerned with anything but results. And now—you are going to marry me."

"I am not!" sobbed Jessica.

"You are." He glanced about. No one was in sight. He put his arm about her shoulders, forcing her own to her sides, then bent back her head and kissed her on the mouth.

"Checkmate!" he said.

TO
THE EDITOR OF "VANITY FAIR,"
BY WAY OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT.



A WHIRL ASUNDER.

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CHAPTER I.

As the train stopped for the sixth time, Clive descended abruptly.

"I think I'll walk the rest of the way," he said to the conductor. "Just look after my portmanteau, will you? And see that it is left at Yorba with my boxes."

"O. K.," said the man. "But you must like walking."

Clive had spent seven days on the ocean, three in the furious energy of New York, and six on a trans-continental train, whose discomforts made him wonder if he had a moral right to enter the embarrassing state of matrimony with a temper hopelessly soured. As he had come to California to marry, and as his betrothed was at a hotel in the northern redwoods, he did not pause for rest in San Francisco; he left, two hours after his arrival, on a narrow-gauge train, which dashed down precipitous mountain slopes, shot, rocking from side to side, about curves on a road so narrow that the brush scraped the windows, or the eye looked down into the

blackness of a cañon, five hundred feet below; raced shrieking across trestles which seemed to swing midway between heaven and earth; only to slacken, with protesting snort and jerk, when climbing to some dizzier height. Clive had stood for an hour on the platform, fascinated by the danger and the bleak solemnity of the forests, whose rigid trunks and short, stiffly pointed arms looked as if they had not quivered since time began. But he felt that he had had enough, moreover that he had not drawn an uncompanied breath since he left England. If he was not possessed by the graceful impatience of the lover he reminded himself that he was tired and nervous, and had been obliged to go dirty for six days, enough to knock the romance out of any man; the ubiquitous human animal had talked incessantly for sixteen days, and his legs ached for want of stretching.

A twisted old man with a sharp eye, a rusty beard depending aimlessly from a thin, tobacco-stained mouth, limped across the platform, rolling a flag. Clive asked him if he could get to the Yorba hotel on foot.

The man stared. "Well, you *be* an Englishman, I guess," he remarked.

"Yes, I am an Englishman," said Clive haughtily.

"Oh, no offence; but the way you English do walk beats us. We ain't none too fond of walkin' in Californy. Too many mountains, I guess. Yes, you kin walk it, and I guess you'll have to. There goes your train. Stranger in these parts?"

"I arrived in California to-day."

"So! Goin' to raise cattle, or just seein' the wonders of the Gold State?"

"Will you kindly point out the way? And I should like to send a despatch to the hotel, if possible."

"Oh, suttently. We don't think much of English manners in these parts, I don't mind sayin'. You English act as if you owned God Almighty when you come out here. You forgit we licked ye twice. Come after a Californy heiress?"

Clive felt an impulse to throw the man over the trestle, then laughed. "I beg your pardon," he said; "I am sorry my manners are bad, but the truth is my head is tired and my legs are not. Come, show me the way."

Being further mollified by a silver dollar, the old man replied graciously, "All right, sir. Just amuse yourself while I send your telegram and fetch a dark lantern. You'll need it. The moon's doin' well, but the tops of them redwoods knit together, and are as close as a roof."

Clive walked idly about the little waiting-room. The walls were decorated with illustrated weekly newspapers and the gratuitous lithograph. John L. Sullivan, looking, under the softening influence of the weekly artist, as if sculptured from mush, glowered across at Corbett, who displayed his muscles in a dandified attitude. There were also several lithographs of pretty, rather elegant-looking girls. Clive noticed that one had a rude frame of young redwood branches about it, and occupied the post of honour at the head of the room. He walked over and examined it as well as he could by the light of the smoking lamp.

The head was in profile, severe in outline, as classic as the modern head ever is. The chin was lifted

proudly, the nostrils looked capable of expansion. The brow and eyes suggested intellect, the lower part of the face pride and self-will and passion, perhaps undeveloped cruelty and sensuality.

"Who is Miss Belmont?" he asked, as the station agent left the telegraph table.

"Oh, she's one of the heiresses. That's our high-toned society paper. It's printin' a series of Californy heiresses. One of the other papers says as how it's a good guide-book for impeccoonious furriners, and I guess that's about the size of it. She's got a million, and nobody but an aunt; and she has her own way, I—tell—you. She'll be a handful to manage; but, somehow, although she keeps people talkin' they don't believe as much harm of her as of some that's more quiet. You'll meet her, I guess, if you're goin' to stay at Yorba, for she's got a big house in the redwoods and knows a lot of the hotel folks and the Bohemian Club fellers. I like her. She rides this way once a year or so, and we have a good chin about politics. She knows a thing or two, you bet, and she believes in Grover."

"How old is she? And why doesn't she marry?" asked Clive idly, as they walked up the road.

"She's twenty-six, and she's goin' to marry—a Noo York feller; one of them with Dutch names. She's had offers, *I* guess. Three of your lords, I know of. But lords don't stand much show with Californy girls—them as was raised here, anyhow. They don't give a damn for titles, and they scent a fortune-hunter before he's off the dock. They've put their heads together and talked him over before he's registered. This Dutchman's got money, so I guess he's all right. Be you a lord?"

"I am not. I am a barrister, and the son of a barrister."

、 "What may that be?"

"I believe you call it lawyer out here."

"O—h—h! A lawyer's a gay bird, ain't he? And don't he have a good time?" The old man chuckled.

"I never found them different from other men. What do you mean?"

"Ours are rippers. I've been in Californy since '49, and I could spin some yarns that would make your hair curl, young man! Lord, Lord! the old ones were tough. The young ones ain't quite so bad, but they're doin' their best."

"California is rather a wild place, isn't it?"

"It was. It's quietin' down now, and it ain't near so interestin'. Jack Belmont, that there young lady's father, was a lawyer when he fust come here, but he struck it rich in Con. Virginia, in '74, and after that warn't he a ripper. Oh, Lord! he *was* a terror. But he done his dooty by his girl; had her eddicated in Paris and Noo Yörk, and never let no one cross her. He was as fine-lookin' a man as ever I seen, almost as tall and clean made as you be, and awful open-handed and popular, although a terrible enemy. He'd shot his man twice over, they say, and I believe it. His wife died ten years before him. She was fond of him, too, poor thing, and he made no bones about bein' unfaithful to her—they don't out here. A man's no good if you can't tell a yarn or two about him. Well, Jack Belmont died five years ago, and left about a million dollars to his girl. He'd had a long sight more, but she was

lucky to git that. They say as how she was awful broke up when he died."

"You're a regular old *chronique scandaleuse*," said Clive, much interested. "What sort of a social position has this Miss Belmont? Is she received?"

"Received? Glory, man! why her father was a Southern gent—Maryland, as I remember—and her mother was from Boston. They led society here in the sixties; they're one of the old families of Californy. That's the reason Miss Belmont does as she damned pleases, and nobody dares say boo—that and the million. She's ancient aristocracy, she is. Received! Oh, Lord!"

Clive, much amused, asked, "What does she do that is so dreadful?"

"Oh, she's been engaged fifteen times; she rides about the country in boy's clothes, and sits up all night under the trees at Del Monte talkin' to a man, or gives all her dances to one man at a party, and then cuts him the next day on the street; and when she gits tired of people, comes up here without even her aunt. She used to run to fires, but she give that up some years ago. She travels about the country for weeks without a chaperon, and once went camping alone with five men. Sometimes she'll fill her house up with men for a week, and not have no other woman, savin' her aunt. Lately she's more quiet, they say, and has become a terrible reader. Last winter she stayed up here for three months alone. I hear as how people talked. But I didn't see nothin'. She's all right, or my name ain't Jo Bagley. Well, here you are, sir. Good luck to ye! Keep to the road and don't strike off on any of them side trails, and you can't go wrong. Evenin'."

Clive went into the dark forest. What the old man had told him of Miss Belmont had quickened his imagination, and he speculated about her for some moments; then his thoughts wandered to his English betrothed. He had not seen her for two years. Her mother's health failing, her father had taken his family to Southern California. A year later Mrs. Gordon had died, and her husband having bought a ranch in which he was much interested, had written to Clive that he wanted his eldest daughter for another year; by that time her sister would have finished school, and could take her place as head of the household. Lately he and Mary had felt the debilitating influence of the southern climate and had gone to the redwoods of the north. There Clive was to meet them, remain a few weeks, then marry in San Francisco and take his wife back to England.

Clive was thirty-four, ten years older than Mary Gordon. He recalled the day he had proposed to her. She had come down the steps of her father's house, in a blue gown and garden hat, and they had gone for a walk in the woods. She was not a clever woman, and she had only the white and pink and brown, the rounded lines of youth, no positive beauty of face or figure; but with the blind instinct of his race he had turned almost automatically to the type of woman who, time out of mind, has produced the strong-limbed, strong-brained men that have made a nation insolently great. She reminded him of his mother, with her even sweetness of nature, her sympathy, her large maternal suggestion. He had known her since her early girlhood and grown fonder of her each year. She rested him,

and had the divine feminine faculty of making him feel a better and cleverer man than he was in the habit of thinking himself elsewhere.

She had accepted him with the sweetest smile he had ever seen, and he had wondered if other men were as fortunate. For two years he saw much of her, then she went to America, and he had plunged into his work and his man's life, not missing her as consistently as he had expected, but caring for her none the less. The Saturday mail brought him, unintermittingly, a letter eight pages long, neatly written, and describing in detail the daily life of her family, and of the strange people about them. They were calm, affectionate, interesting letters, which Clive enjoyed, and to which he replied with a hurried scrawl, rarely covering more than one page. An Englishwoman does not expect much, but Mary occasionally hinted sadly that a longer letter would make her happier; whereupon his conscience hurt him and he wrote her two pages.

He enjoyed these two years, despite hard work; he was popular with men and women, and much was popular with him that adds to the keener pleasures of life. When the time came to pack his boxes and go to America he puffed a large regretful rack from his last pipe of freedom; but it did not occur to him to ask for release. For the matter of that, although he had come to regard Mary Gordon as the inevitable rather than the desired, he felt for her the strong tenderness which such men feel for such women, which endures, and never in any circumstances turns to hate.

After a time Clive extinguished the lantern: it illuminated the road fitfully, but accentuated the dense

blackness of the forest. The undergrowth was too thick to permit him to stray aside, and he wanted to form some idea of his surroundings. His eyes accustomed themselves to the dark. Moon rays splashed or trickled here and there through lofty cleft and mesh. Clive paused once and looked up. The straight trees, sometimes slender, sometimes huge, were as inflexible as granite, an unbroken column for a hundred feet or more; then thrusting out rigid arms from a tapering trunk into another hundred feet of space. The effect was that of a dense forest suspended in air, supported above the low brush forest on a vast irregular colonnade, out of whose ruins it might have sprung. Clive had never known a stillness so profound, a repose so absolute. But it was not the peaceful repose of an English wood. It suggested the heavy brooding stillness of archaic days, when the uneasy world drowsed before another convulsion. There was some other influence abroad in the woods, but at the time its meaning eluded him.

Suddenly it occurred to him that he could not see Mary Gordon in this forest. There was an irritating incongruity in the very thought. She belonged to the sweet calm beech-woods of England; nothing in her was in consonance with the storm and stress, the passion and fatality which this strange country suggested. Did the women of California fit their frame? He experienced a strong desire for the companionship of a woman who would interpret this forest to him; then called himself an ass and strode on.

An hour later he became aware of a distant and deep murmur. It was crossed suddenly by a wild hilarious yell. Clive relit the lantern and flashed it

along the brush at his right. Presently he came upon a narrow trail. The prospect of adventure after sixteen days of civilised monotony lured him aside, and he walked rapidly down the by-path. In a few moments he found himself on the edge of a large clearing. The moon poured in without let, and revealed a scene of singular and uncomfortable suggestion.

In the middle of the space was a huge funeral pyre; beyond it, evidently on a bier, Clive could see the stony, upturned feet of a mammoth corpse, lightly covered with a white pall. Between the pyre and the trees nearer him a large caldron swung over a heap of faggots, which were beginning to crackle gently. The place looked as if about to be the scene of some awful rite. Englishmen are willing to believe anything about California, and Clive, who had commanded the admiration of his father's colleagues with his clear, quick, logical brain, leaped at once to the conclusion that this part of California was still the hunting-ground of the Red Indian, and that some mighty chief was about to be cremated; whilst his widow, perchance, sacrificed herself in the caldron.

He plunged his hands into his pockets and awaited developments with the nervous delight of a schoolboy. Although the forest was silent again, he had an uneasy sense of many human beings at no great distance.

He had not long to wait. There was a sudden red glare which made the aisles of the forest seem alive with dancing shapes, hideously contorted. Simultaneously there arose a low, soft chanting, monotonous and musical, bizarre rather than weird. Then out of the recesses on the far side of the clearing, startlingly

defined under the blaze of many torches held aloft in the background, emerged a high priest, his crown shaven, his beard flowing to his waist, his white robes marking the austerity of his order. His hands were folded on his breast, his head bowed. Behind him, two and two, followed twenty acolytes, swinging censers, the heavy perfume of the incense rising to the pungent odour of the redwoods, blending harmoniously: the lofty forest aisles were become those of some vast primeval crypt.

Then illusion was in a measure dispelled. The two hundred torch-bearers who came after wore the ordinary outing clothes of civilisation.

The strange procession marched slowly round the circle, passing perilously close to Clive. Then the priest and acolytes walked solemnly up to the caldron, the others dispersing themselves irregularly, leaping occasionally and waving their torches. The faggots were blazing; Clive fancied he heard a merry bubbling. A moment of profound silence. Then the priest dropped something into the caldron, chanting an invocation of which Clive could make nothing, although he was a scholar in several languages. The acolytes and torch-bearers tossed to the priest entities and imaginations, which he dropped with much ceremony into the caldron, to the accompaniment of hollow, not to say ribald laughter, and jests which had a strong flavour of personalities.

The prologue lasted ten minutes. Then the mummers crowded backward and faced the pyre. Again the heavy silence fell. The priest went forward, and raising his clasped hands and set face to the moon,

stood, for a moment, like a statue on a monument, then turned slowly and beckoned. The acolytes formed in line and marched with solemn precision to the other side of the pyre. A moment later they reappeared, walking with halting steps, their heads bowed, chanting dismally. On their shoulders they carried a long bier, on which, apparently, lay the corpse of a dead giant. The priest sprinkled the body, then turned away with a gesture of loathing. The acolytes carried it by the torch-bearers, who spat upon and execrated it; then slowly and laboriously mounted the pyre, and, dropping the bier on its apex, scampered indecorously down with savage grunts of satisfaction, their white garments fluttering along the dark pile like a wash on a windy day. The corpse lay long and white and horrid under the beating moon and the flare of torch. As the acolytes reached the ground the rest of the company rushed simultaneously forward, and with a hideous yell flung their torches at the pyre. There was the hiss of tar, the leap of one great flame, an angry crackling. A moment more and the forest would be more vividly alight than it had ever been at noonday. Clive, feeling as uncomfortable as an eavesdropper, but too fascinated to retreat, stepped behind a large redwood. With his eyes still fixed on the strange scene he did not pick his steps, and coming suddenly in contact with a pliable body, he nearly knocked it over. There was a smothered shriek, followed by a suppressed but forcible vocative. Clive mechanically lifted his hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said, addressing a tall lad, whose face was partly concealed by the visor of a cap; "I hope I have not hurt you."

"I am not so easily hurt," said the lad haughtily.

The masculine man never lived who did not recognise a feminine woman in whatever guise, if within the radius of her magnetism. This young masquerader interested Clive at once. Her voice had a warm huskiness. The mouth and chin were classically cut, but very human. She had thrown back her head and revealed a round beautiful throat. The loose flannel shirt and jacket concealed her figure, but even the slight motions she had made revealed energy and grace.

Clive offered her a cigarette. She accepted it and smoked daintily, withdrawing as much as possible into the shadow and shielding her face with her hand. He leaned his back against the tree and lit a cigar.

"What on earth is the meaning of this scene?" he asked.

"That is the great Midsummer Jinks ceremony of the Bohemian Club. They have it every year, and never invite outsiders. So I was bound I'd see it, anyhow."

"I wonder you don't become a member."

"Oh, I'm too young," promptly.

"Tell me more about it. What do these ceremonies mean?"

"Oh, they put all sorts of things into that caldron—the liver of a grasshopper with one of Harry Armstrong's jokes; the wasted paint on somebody's last picture with the misshapen feet of somebody's else latest verse. That corpse is an effigy of Care, and they are cremating him. Now they'll be happy, that is to say, drunk, till morning, for Care is dead. I'm going to stop and see it out."

"I think you had better go home."

"Indeed?" Clive saw the hand that shielded her face jerk.

"Did you ever see, or rather hear, a lot of men on a lark when they fancied that no women were about?"

"No; but that is what I wish to do."

"Which you are not going to do to-night."

There was a sudden snapping of dry leaves. A small foot had come down with emphasis.

"*What* do you mean?"

"That this is no place for a woman, and that you must go."

"I'm not—well, I am, and I don't care in the least whether you know it or not. I wish you to understand, sir, that I shall stay here, and that I am not in the habit of being dictated to."

"You are Miss Belmont, I suppose."

An instant's pause. Then she replied with a haughty pluck which delighted him: "Yes, I am Miss Belmont, and you are an insolent Englishman."

"How do you know that I am an Englishman?"

"Anyone could tell, from your voice and your overbearing manner."

"Well, I am," said Clive, much amused.

"I detest Englishmen."

"Smoke a little, or I am afraid you will cry."

She obeyed with unexpected docility, but in a moment crushed the coal of her cigarette on a damp tree stump. Then she turned to him and folded her arms.

"I am not going to leave," she said evenly. "What are you going to do about it?"

"How did you get here?"

"On my horse."

"Where is he?"

"Tethered off the road."

"Very well; if you are not on that horse in five minutes, I shall carry you to it, and, what is more, I shall kiss you."

She deliberately moved into the light and pushed her cap to the back of her head, disarranging a mass of curling dark hair. Her colouring was indefinable in the red light, but her eyes were large and long, and heavily lashed. They sparkled wickedly. The nostrils of her finely-cut nose were dilating; her short upper lip was lifted. Clive ardently hoped that she would continue to defy him. Her whole attitude was that of a young worldling, delighting in an unforeseen adventure.

"Who are you, anyhow?" she demanded. "Of course I could see at once that you were a gentleman, or I should not have taken the slightest notice of you."

"Thanks. My name is Owin Clive."

"Oh, you are Mary Gordon's friend, that she has been expecting."

"Miss Gordon is an old friend of mine." He half consciously hoped that Miss Belmont did not know of his engagement.

"She says you are frightfully handsome."

Clive laughed. "I cannot imagine Miss Gordon using any such expression; but then she has been two years in California."

"I suppose Englishmen can't help being rude. I remember exactly what she said, and she said it so slowly and placidly. 'Oh, yes, dear Miss Belmont, I think our men are very fine-looking indeed.' (I had been black-guarding them.) 'My friend, Mr. Clive, of whom you

have heard me speak, is quite the handsomest man I have ever seen.’”

“That sounds more like it. And that is exactly what she would have said two years ago. I mean,” laughing with some embarrassment, “the way she would have expressed herself.”

“Oh, I suppose you are a mass of vanity; all men are. Yes; your Mary Gordon is as English as if she had never left Hertfordshire. And always will be. She hasn’t a spark of originality.

Clive discerned her purpose, but he replied coldly, “Say rather that she has individuality.”

“Which she hasn’t, and you know it. I have that. Do you think there is much in common between us?”

“How can I tell, after knowing you ten minutes?”

“I can’t get a rise out of you, I see. You Englishmen are such phlegmatic creatures. I don’t believe there is a spark of impulse left in your island.”

“You are a very brave young woman.”

“Why?” She drew her eyelashes together, shooting forth audacity.

“Do you want me to kiss you?”

The muscles of her face twitched angrily. “An Englishman’s only idea of wit is impertinence.”

“What have Englishmen done to you that you are so bitter? I don’t believe those lordlings I have heard of, proposed, after all.”

“They did,” replied Miss Belmont emphatically, and quite restored. “Every last one of them. I made Dynevor fetch and carry like a trained dog. It was great fun. I used to say, before a room full of people, ‘Go get my fan, little man; I left it with Charley Rollins in

the conservatory.' And he would trot off; he was that hard up, poor thing!"

• "I am glad you did not marry any of them; I am sure they were not good enough for you."

"How polite of you. Why don't you step out and let me see you?"

"My vanity will not permit. I feel sure that your remarkable frankness would not allow you to disguise your disappointment."

"Well, I shall see you on Sunday. You are coming with Miss Gordon to dine with me. She has accepted for you."

"I shall wait until then. I look better in evening clothes and when I am clean."

"I like your voice and your figure, and you certainly have a remarkable amount of magnetism," she said meditatively. "Good heavens! what a row those idiots are making. And do look at that bonfire. It looks for all the world as if the earth had run its tongue out at the moon."

Clive wondered why he did not kiss her. He certainly wanted to, and he certainly would have been justified. He recalled no other attractive woman who would have had to offer half the encouragement with which Miss Belmont had recklessly toyed. A man who coined epigrams for sale had once said of him: "Clive is thorough-bred; he can drink the strongest whisky, smoke the blackest cigars, and he never fails to kiss a pretty woman when the opportunity offers." And yet, so far, something about Miss Belmont stayed him. He had no intention that it should endure, however.

The scene was growing more and more picturesque.

Behind them was a great roar, crossed by the howling and yelling of two hundred and twenty-one abandoned throats. The remotest aisles of the forest were crimson. Every needle of the delicate young redwoods, every waving frond was etched minutely on the red transparency. The thousand columns with their stark capitals wore a softened and gracious aspect, albeit the general effect of the night was infernal.

"Are you going?" asked Clive.

"No." She curled her lips defiantly away from her teeth.

Clive crossed the short space between them with one step, lifted her in his arms and walked rapidly up the trail. For a moment she was too stupefied to protest; then she attempted violently to free herself.

"What do you mean?" she cried furiously. "Do you know who I am? I am in the habit of doing exactly as I please. Everybody knows me here. If you have misunderstood me it's because you are a thick-headed Englishman, used to women who are either stupid or bad."

"You mean that the men you surround yourself with are idiots who permit you to play with them as you choose. Keep quiet. Don't you see that you can't get away? If you struggle I shall hurt you, and I don't want to do that."

"I have sat up all night with men and they have never dared to kiss me, however much they may have wanted to."

"Then they were rotters, and you can tell them so, with my compliments. If I sat up all night with you I should kiss you, and several times."

"Well, you never will!"

They reached the road. She stiffened suddenly and tried to spring out of his arms. He placed her on her feet and grasped her firmly by the shoulders.

"Now," he said, "kiss me, and don't be silly about it. If you go in for larks of this sort you must take the consequences." She wrenched again. He caught and held her so firmly that she could not struggle.

"You brute of an Englishman!" she gasped.

Clive clasped his hand about the lower part of her face and lifted it gently. As he did so he shifted his position and the light, for the first time, shone full on his face. The girl became suddenly quiet. Something leaped into her eyes which his own answered. But as he bent his face she moved her head backward along his shoulder.

"Please, *please* don't," she said beseechingly. "Oh, please don't."

Clive let her go. He walked with her to the horse, mounted her, and watched her dash away.

"What a stupid ass I am," he thought. "Why on earth didn't I kiss that woman?"

He walked up the road for a few moments, then turned and made for the clearing.

The flames were still leaping symmetrically upward into a dense column of smoke, the men still dancing about the pyre, their enthusiasm unabated. As Clive suddenly appeared in their midst an immediate and disagreeable silence fell. Clive had never felt so uncomfortable in his life. He concealed a certain amount of natural shyness under a haughty bearing, which would

have repelled strangers had it not been for his charm of expression, the quick laughter of his eyes.

"Does Mr. Charles Rollins happen to be here?" he asked stiffly. "I have brought a letter to him. My name is Clive. I have an apology to make. I stumbled upon your strange ceremony and watched it, not knowing at the time that there was anything private about it——"

"Don't mention it. Don't mention it," cried a hearty voice. A young man pushed forward from the back of the circle and grasped his hand. "I had a letter from Stanley and hoped you would get here in time for this. You can make up for being late only by drinking six quarts of fizz between now and sunrise. Boys, come up and shake."

Clive's hand was shaken, with a solemnity which at first embarrassed, then amused him, by every man present. Then solemnity vanished, and with it any lingering remnant of Clive's shyness. The odour of savoury viands mingled with burning pitch and the subtler perfumes of the forest. A great table was spread. Champagne corks flew. Before an hour was done Clive was voted the liveliest Englishman that had ever set foot in California, and elected off-hand an honorary member of the Bohemian Club.

CHAPTER II.

AT four o'clock Clive once more started for Yorba. He had not drunken six quarts of champagne, but he had commanded the respect of his comrades by the courage with which he had mixed his drinks. Rollins had held his head under a waterfall in the little river, but it still felt very large. He took off his straw hat and looked at it resentfully. Why had he not worn his travelling cap? He also felt depressed, and reproached himself vehemently. What must Mary Gordon think? Doubtless she was sitting up, waiting for him, and thought him dead—murdered. Nevertheless he had enjoyed himself thoroughly, and he found remorse more coy than he would have wished. He had an uneasy consciousness that if his head did not ache so confoundedly he would not feel remorse at all.

His thoughts wandered to Miss Belmont. "I believe I found the woman for the forest, after all. I wonder if she would fit it as well now. Perhaps, in another mood. I fancy she is a woman of many."

The redwoods were dripping with mist, itself as motionless as the silent trees it shrouded. It filled every hollow, was banked in every aisle, lay like silver cobweb on the young redwoods and ferns. It emphasised the ghastly silence. Not a bird was awake,

not a crawling thing moved. Once a panther cried far up on the mountain, but that was all.

Clive came upon the hotel an hour later, a long rough wooden structure at the foot of the mountain, up which straggled many cottages. Hard by, across a little creek, were a saloon and billiard room. As he ascended the steps, a stout man with a red, heavy face, came out of the office, stretching himself.

"You're Mr. Clive, the Gordons' friend, I surmise," he said.

"I hope they haven't sat up for me." He devoutly hoped they had not.

"They hain't. Miss Gordon waited till twelve, then concluded you'd fallen in with the Bohemian Club, as she knowed you'd brought a letter to Rollins. Jedging by the looks of you, I should say you had. Come over to the bar and taper off. My name's Hart, and I run this hotel."

"Thank you," said Clive grimly, "but I'll have no more to-night. Be good enough to show me to my room, and be sure to have me wakened at eight. I suppose Mr. and Miss Gordon are not up before then. If they are, please give them my compliments and tell them that I did fall in with the Bohemian Club."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Clive awoke and looked at his watch it was a quarter to three in the afternoon. He sprang out of bed in dismay. He was an ideal lover! If Mary Gordon sent him about his business he could not question the justice of the act. After a hurried tub and toilet he went in search of his landlord.

"Why in thunder didn't you call me at eight?" he asked savagely.

"Miss Gordon was up at seven, mister, and she gave strict orders that you was not to be disturbed. I'm to take you over to her cottage the minute you show up and to send a broiled chicken after you."

"She's an angel," thought Clive, "and will certainly make an ideal wife."

He followed his host out of the hotel and up the hill. The summer girl in pink and blue, sailor hat and shirt-waist, dotted the greenery; in rare instances attended by a swain. On the piazzas of the hotel and cottages older women knitted or read novels.

The day was very warm. The sun shone down into the forest above and about the cottages, where the trees were not so densely planted as in the depths. The under forest looked very green and fresh. A creek murmured somewhere. Bees hummed drowsily.

Clive's head still ached, and he was hungry; but at

this moment he was conscious of nothing but a paramount wish to see Mary Gordon.

Mr. Gordon, a pink-faced man with white side-whiskers, was standing on the piazza of a tiny cottage which looked as if it had been built in a night. He winked at Clive as he came down and shook him heartily by the hand. He had loved his wife and been kind to her, but had always done exactly as he pleased.

"She's inside," he whispered, "and I don't think she'll row you. Sorry it happened, but just vow it never will again and she'll forget it. They always do, bless them!"

Clive went hastily into the little parlour. Mary Gordon was standing in the middle of the room, her hands tightly clasped, her eyes very bright, her upper lip caught between her teeth. Clive saw in a glance that she had more style and grace of carriage than when she had left England. Her hair was more fashionably arranged, and altogether she was a handsomer girl. He took her in his arms and kissed her many times, and she cried softly on his shoulder. He humbled himself to the dust and was told that he must always do exactly what he wanted; and he felt a distinct thrill of pleasurable domestic anticipation. He had been spoiled all his life, and would have taken to matrimonial discipline very unkindly.

When he had eaten of the broiled chicken and several other substantial delicacies, and was at peace with himself and the world once more, he went for a long walk in the forest with Mary. After a time they sat down on a log, and he lit his pipe and tried to imagine an environment of English oaks and beeches.

Again and more forcibly he felt the discordance between the English girl, simplified by generations of discipline and homogeneous traditions, and this green light, this strange brooding silence, this vast solitude suggesting a new world, a new race, an unimaginable future, this hot, electric, sensuous air.

They talked of the past two years and of their future together.

"I have not told anyone yet that we are engaged," said Mary. "People here don't seem to take things as seriously as we do, and I could not stand being chaffed about it. I have merely said that we expected an old and dear friend of the family."

"I am glad. It's a bore to be chaffed."

"Of course, I have written to all our friends in England that we are to be married on the twelfth. But as the wedding is to be so quiet it is not necessary to tell anyone here."

"How do you like this country?" he asked curiously. "I mean, how does it suit you personally? Of course, I know you would make up your mind to like any place where duty happened to take you, but you must have a private little idea on the subject, and it is your duty to tell me everything."

She smiled happily. "Well!" as they say here, "now that I am sure that Edith will make papa comfortable, I shall be glad enough to go back to England. California doesn't suit me at all. It rubs me the wrong way. I think I should develop nerves if I stayed here much longer. Americans don't seem to me to be half human. Helena Belmont says that America will be the greatest nation on earth when it gets a soul, but that

it is nothing but a kicking, squalling, precocious infant at present; and that if someone were clever enough to stick his finger in the soft spot on the top of its head, it would transform it into an idiot or a corpse; but that America will pull through all right because she has so many weak points that her enemies forget which is the weakest. Miss Belmont is so clever. You will meet her on Sunday. You don't mind my having accepted an invitation for you to dine there?"

"Not at all. It was very kind of you, I am sure. I have heard of this Miss Belmont; I don't imagine you find much in common with her."

"She horrifies me, but she fascinates me more than any person I have met here. I am sure she is a good woman in spite of the reckless things she does. Your friend Mr. Rollins says that she is the concentrated essence of California, and I always excuse her on that ground. You never know what she is going to do or say next; and she is the most desperate flirt I ever heard of. I suppose she is so beautiful she can't help it. Her eyes always seem to be looking at you through tears, even when they are laughing or flirting, although I don't believe she sheds many. I cannot imagine her crying, although I know her to be kind-hearted, and generous, and impulsive."

"Do you call it kind-hearted to throw fifteen men over?"

"I told her once that I thought it was morally wrong for her to lure men on to such a terrible awakening; and she said that there was just one thing that man didn't know, which was woman; and that it was her

duty to her sex to addle their brains on the subject as much as possible. But I want you to know me, Owin."

• "The better I know you the better I shall love you."

"When your eyes laugh like that I never know whether you are chaffing me or not. It will not take long, for I am not clever;" she smiled a little sadly. "You are so clever that I know you will often want to go and talk to women who know more than I do; but none of them will ever love you so well."

"I know it," he said tenderly, and he believed what he said.

"I am glad that I have been in California, though," pursued Mary. "It has broadened me. At home we take it for granted that all the unconventional people are bad, and all the conventional ones good. Here it is so different; although I must say that I never heard so much petty gossip and scandal in my life as there is in the smart set in San Francisco. All visitors remark that; I suppose it is because they have so little to do and think about. It is very slow here socially; and I suppose that is what makes some of the women do such outlandish things—that and the country, for even the quiet ones are not exactly like other people. One can judge for oneself. I have often pinned the tattlers down when they were abusing Helena Belmont, for instance, and they could not verify a single statement."

"Women know each other very little," said Clive.

CHAPTER IV.

HE passed his nights in the Bohemian Club camp, his mornings in bed, the remaining hours wandering about with his betrothed; and felt that altogether life was not understood by the pessimists. England, with the struggles and cares and responsibilities it held in store for him, seemed to exist only between the rusty covers of history, and life a thing to be dawdled away in a wonderful forest, where the very air made a man hate the thought of all that was hard and ugly and too serious.

Clive was something more than curious to see Miss Belmont again, but hardly knew whether he ought to go to her house or not. It was possible that she expected him to decline an invitation proffered before an unpleasant adventure; but unless he pleaded sudden illness he did not see his way out of acceptance. On Saturday, however, Mary received a note from the *châtelaine* of Casa del Norte, reminding her of the dinner and of her promise to bring Mr. Clive.

"Charley Rollins tells me that he is the best all-round Englishman he has ever known," the note concluded; "not the least bit of a cad. I am most anxious to meet him."

Mary laughed as she handed the note to Clive. "If

any other woman had written that I'd never enter her house again. But, somehow, you let her say and do exactly what she chooses. The trouble is that the only Englishmen she has met have been fortune-hunters. When we are married I'll ask her over to visit us, and let her meet men who are almost as perfect as you are."

Clive said "Yes, dear," absently. Three days of unshifting devotion had blunted the fine point of his content.

The next day Mary was prostrate with one of the severe headaches to which she was subject, and sent Clive off with Charley Rollins to the dinner.

"Go, go, my boy," Mr. Gordon had said to him, when Clive had displayed a decent amount of reluctance; "she'll be too ill to be spoken to for twenty-four hours. You could do no good by hanging round."

During the hour's drive through the redwoods Clive said to Rollins, "You are a great friend of Miss Belmont, are you not?"

"I am, for a fact."

"Have you known her long?"

"She nearly scratched my eyes out when she was three and I five. I've adored her ever since, and think the reason I've been able to hang on successfully is because I've never proposed to her."

"I've heard several opinions of her, and I'd like yours. I can't say that, so far, I've met anyone likely to understand her. You should, particularly as you have never made love to her."

Rollins half closed his shrewd, dark eyes, and tilted his hat over his nose. Like all San Francisco men, he looked carelessly dressed, although in evening clothes,

and carried himself badly; but his face was clear and refined, his hair and beard trimly cut.

"Helena Belmont," he said, in what the club called his "summing-up voice," "has the genius of California in her, like Sibyl Sanderson and a dozen others I could mention without stopping to think, although they would be mere names to you. You see, it is like this: all sorts of men came here in early days—poor men of good family who had failed at home, or were too proud to work there; desperadoes, adventurers, men of middle life and broken fortunes—all of them expecting everything from the new land, and ready to tear the heart out of anyone who got in their way. It was every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. Many succeeded. Some of their methods will not bear the fierce light of history. That savage spirit, that instinct to trample to a goal over anything or anybody, that intolerance of restraint, still lingers in the very atmosphere, and is quick in the blood of many of the present generation, although, strangely enough, it has given a distincter individuality to the women than to the men. Of course, there are Californians and Californians. It is always a mistake to generalise too freely, but the type I speak of is the most significant, although you will find no Californian exactly like any other American. This is the land of the composite. All America and all Europe have emptied themselves into it. God knows what it will sift down to eventually—the commonplace, probably. As for Helena Belmont, Jack Belmont, her father, came here in the fifties, and hung up his shingle. He was one of the cleverest lawyers the State has had. He rarely drew a sober breath, and was never seen to stagger; he was an

inveterate gambler, and a terror with women. He married a Miss Lowell, of Boston, who came out here on a visit—a beautiful girl; and God knows what she went through with him. You may be surprised that she married him. I may have given you the impression that he was a cowboy in a red shirt and sombrero. Jack Belmont was one of the most elegant men this State has ever seen, a gentleman when he was drunkest, and the idol of the Southern set, a strong contingent here. There you have the elements of which Helena Belmont is made up. She has the blood of Cavaliers and Roundheads in her veins; she grew up amidst the clash of the South against the North, for no two people could ever have been more unmated than her mother and father; and she was born in California, nurtured on its new savage traditions, and mentally and temperamentally fitted to draw in twice her measure of its atmosphere. She does what she pleases, because she would never know if she were beaten, has a tremendous personality and a million dollars. Here we are.”

CHAPTER V.

THE forest had ended abruptly. They had come upon a large low adobe house on a plateau, looking down over a shelving table-land upon the ocean, a mile below.

"It's about eighty years old," said Rollins, "which is antique in this country. It belonged to one of the grandees of the old time, and Miss Belmont bought it shortly after her father's death. She has several houses, but this is her favourite. It has about thirty rooms, and there have been some jolly good times up here, I can tell you. Those are the original tiles and the original walls, but everything else has been pretty well modernised, except that old orchard you see on the other side and the vineyard and rose-garden."

They dismounted at an open gateway in a high adobe wall, and entered a large orderless garden. The air was sweet with the delicate perfume of Castilian roses, whose green, thorny bushes, thick with pink, rioted over the walls, up the oaks, across the paths, and looked as if no hand had cut or trimmed them since the old Spaniard had coaxed them from the soil, nearly a century ago.

"She hates modern gardens," said Rollins, "and has never had a gardener in this. We'd prefer to walk

without leaving ourselves in shreds and patches on the thorns, but if it suits her I suppose it's all right."

They entered the house opposite a courtyard filled with palm-trees and rustic chairs. A large curiously-modelled fountain, which Rollins told Clive was the work of the old Franciscans, splashed lazily. Several young men were swinging in hammocks on the corridor which traversed the four sides of the court. A Chinese servant, in blouse and pendent cue, was passing cocktails.

Rollins conducted Clive into a small drawing-room, fitted in copper-coloured silken stuffs, and overlooking the ocean. Neither Miss Belmont nor her aunt was present, and Rollins introduced Clive to the assembled guests, with running foot-notes not intended for the ear of the subject.

"Miss Lord"—presenting Clive to a tall, handsome, scornful-looking girl. "She tears out reputations with her teeth. Miss Carter—a clever little snob, who is a joy to flirt with because you know she is too selfish to fall in love with you. Mrs. Lent—an army flirt, who has done much to educate the youth of San Francisco. Mrs. Volney—a widow with a commanding talent for marrying and burying rich husbands. Miss Leonard—who plays better than any woman in San Francisco, which is saying a good deal; a lovely girl, if a trifle cold. Mrs. Tower—a really charming young widow, with a voice as fiery as her eyes. Miss West—who is half Spanish, a good deal of a prude, and a most accomplished flirt. Here comes Mrs. Cartright, who has the honour of being Miss Belmont's aunt, chaperon, and slave."

A middle-aged lady—small, stout, but with much dignity of bearing, her dark face refined and gentle—

entered, and greeted Clive with the rich Southern brogue which twenty years of California had not tempered. As he exchanged platitudes with her she reminded him of a gentle breeze which had wandered aimlessly in, barely touching his cheek. She talked incessantly, and wholly without consequence.

Clive had created a perceptible flutter among the women. Being a shy man, he was painfully aware that every eye in the room was upon him, and that he was being discussed behind more than one fan. The other men—society youths—had entered, and looked crude and new beside him. He had the straight figure of the athlete, and carried his clothes in a manner which made Rollins feel, as he confided to Miss Carter, like hitching up his trousers. His closely-cut hair was almost black; his moustache the colour of straw, and as uneven as frequent conflagrations could make it, fell over a delicately-cut, strong, mobile mouth. It had taken many generations to breed his profile—so delicate and sensitive was it, yet so strong. His eyes were grey and well set, full of humour and fire. The chin and neck were a trifle heavy. There was something very splendid about the whole appearance of the man, and he filled the eye whenever he stood in a room.

Mrs. Cartright's fluttering attention having been deflected elsewhere, he plunged his hands into his pockets and talked to Mrs. Volney, whose *crêpe* set off a pair of shoulders of which he approved. She was a remarkably pretty woman, with large innocent-looking green eyes and golden hair, and conversed with a babyish inflection which he thought very fetching. In a moment he forgot

her, and went toward the door with Rollins. Miss Belmont had entered.

The pink colour in her face flamed for a moment, but her eyes lit with an admiration so unmistakable that Clive, too, coloured and laughed nervously. He wondered if his eyes were as frank as hers. Her tall slim figure was very round; the delicate neck carried no superfluous flesh, but was apparently boneless. The small proud head was poised well back. Clive knew her features; but the rich mahogany-brown hair, crisp and electric, and curling unmanageably, the dark blue eyes, the warm whiteness of skin, the pink of cheek and lip, were the splendid finish of a hasty sketch. Her white gown was of some silken stuff embroidered with silver, and pearls were in her hair and about her throat. She looked as proud and calm and well-conducted as a young empress.

"Of course this is Mr. Clive," she said. "You are not at all necessary, Charley. I am so sorry Miss Gordon is ill. Give me your arm; dinner is ready. I know that you have not told anyone," she murmured, as they walked down the corridor.

"How do you know? It is a good story, and I may have told it all over the place."

"I am sure you have not even told it to Miss Gordon."

"Why Miss Gordon?" he asked, smiling into her frankly curious eyes.

"Are you engaged to her?"

He laughed but made no reply.

"I don't believe you are," she said abruptly, after they were seated. "You don't look the least bit as if anyone owned you."

"Why did you make an English room of this? It might have been taken bodily out of some old manor-house. These Chinamen in it are an anomaly. I should have thought you would rather preserve the character of the country."

"The old Californians had no taste whatever about interiors—whitewashed walls and hair-cloth furniture. Besides, we have just about as much of California out here as we can stand, and like to import something else into it occasionally."

There were eighteen people at table. The conversation was principally about other people. Occasionally, a current novel or play captured a few moments attention, but the talk soon swung triumphantly back to personalities. Clive had never seen so many pretty women together. One or two were beautiful. The dense blackness of Mrs. Tower's hair, the red and olive of her skin, the high cheek bones, modelled features and fierce eyes suggested Indian ancestry. Miss West's soft Spanish eyes languished or coquetted, but there was a New England meagreness about her mouth. Miss Leonard, with her *cendré* hair, and cold, regular features might have had all the blood of all the Howards in her. Mrs. Lent had a dark, piquant Franco-American face. Miss Carter was very small, very dignified, with large, cool, intelligent grey eyes, abundant yellow hair, and an Irish nose and upper lip. All had the slight bust and generous development of hip and leg peculiar to the Californian woman. The men interested Clive less: they looked very ordinary society youths, and he wondered if Rollins could not dispose of them collectively in an epigram.

He quarrelled intermittently with Miss Belmont: they

did not hit it off. Nevertheless, he wondered if it could be the rashling he had met in the forest. She still wore her regal air and would have looked as cold as one of the fine marbles in her drawing-room, had it not been for her lavish colouring. She took little part in the general conversation, and he said to her abruptly—

“These people don’t seem to interest you.”

“I’m tired to death of them. I’ll turn them all out presently. I bought this place to be near the redwoods, which I love better than anything in the world, and I like to entertain by fits and starts. I spent last winter here alone.”

“I should like to have known you then. When you get time to think about yourself you must be a charming egoist.”

“You have the most impertinent tongue and the most flirtatious eyes I have ever met.”

“Where is the man you are engaged to?”

“Up at Shasta and the lava beds. He will be back in a few days. You will like him.”

“Is he a good fellow?”

“Yes,” with friendly enthusiasm; “an awfully good fellow.”

“You don’t love him, though.”

Her lashes half met—a habit they had. “No,” she said, “I don’t believe I do.”

“Helena! Helena!” cried Rollins, “Clive, I feel it my duty to tell you that she is engaged, and for the fifteenth time.”

“He has been telling me that I am not in love with Mr. Van Rhuys, and intimating that he has come just in time to save me from a fatal mistake.”

She looked charmingly impertinent, her eyes half closed, her chin lifted, her pink lips pouting from their classic lines.

Clive was somewhat taken aback, but replied promptly, "If I disclaim, it is from timidity, not lack of gallantry: I fear I should learn more than I have the power to teach."

Everybody laughed. Miss Belmont's eyes sparkled. "You mean," she said, when the attention of the others was once more diverted, "that you are not going to fall in love with me. Everybody does, you know. I never mind surrounding myself with beautiful women, because I am much more fascinating than any of them."

"I am hopelessly unoriginal, but I shall make a desperate effort this time."

"Why do you say that? You look quite unlike anyone I have ever seen; I mean quite a different person looks out of your eyes." Her own eyes had a frankly speculative regard devoid of coquetry. Clive's masculine vanity warmed.

"You read a great deal, I hear," he said.

"What an extraordinary way you have of ignoring what a person says to you. Are you absent-minded, or deaf, or merely impolite?"

"Merely an Englishman."

Miss Belmont's colour deepened. Clive's eyes invoked a ridiculous picture of a stately young *châtelaine* kicking and struggling in an Englishman's arms.

"Why do the people of your country take pride in being rude?"

"They don't. They don't bother about trifles like the men of several other nations, that is all. I'll open

the door for you when you leave the room, and even take off my hat in the lift and catch a cold in my head, but don't expect me to find a reply to all the nonsense a woman chooses to talk, if a more interesting subject occurs to me."

"Are you very haughty and supercilious, or are you very shy?"

"What does that mean?"

"I mean that you were flattered to death by what I said, and changed the subject as a girl would blush or stammer."

"I suspect you are right." He rose to let her pass. His eyes laughed down into hers, and she felt the sudden content of a child when it is noticed by a person of superior years and stature.

"That man has the most charming eyes I ever saw," she said, as the dining-room door closed behind the women. "I don't believe they ever could be sober."

"Just observe his lower jaw," said Mrs. Volney, with her infantile lisp.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN the men left the dining-room they found the women in the patio, or scattered about the corridor. There was no moon, but the clear sky blazed with stars, and coloured lanterns swung between the pillars or among the broad leaves of the palm-trees. The girls (the married women were little more) had thrown lace or silken scarves over their heads, and fluttered their fans idly. Clive recalled all he had read of the old time, and imagined himself back among the careless dons and doñas who lived for little but pleasure, and had not a prescience of the complex civilisation to enter their Arcadia and rout its very memory.

Miss Belmont was sitting on the corridor, leaning over the low balustrade, her hands lightly clasped. She had draped a white lace mantilla about her head, and looked more Spanish than Miss West. It seemed to Clive that she had a faculty of looking whatever she wished. Someone handed her a guitar. She leaned against the pillar and tuned it absently. Clive walked over and stood staring down on her, his hands in his pockets. She sang, in a rich contralto voice, a Spanish song, whose words he could not understand, but which was the most passionate he had ever heard. Her head was thrown back. She sang frankly to Clive; her face changed with every line.

When it was over Mrs. Cartright breathed a plaintive sigh. "That's the handsomest song that Helena sings," she announced.

Helena arose abruptly. "Come," she said to Clive. "Let us go for a walk."

He followed her out into the rose-garden. There were no lanterns here, and it looked wilder than by day. The air was very warm and sweet. Helena plucked one of the pink Castilian roses, and fastened back her mantilla with it, exposing a charming ear.

"You will never find any occupation so becoming to your hands," said Clive dutifully. "Are your feet as perfect?"

"They are something to dream of," said Miss Belmont flippantly.

They went out on to the terrace. The ocean pounded monotonously, tossing spray high into the air. Clive looked at his companion. Her head was thrown back, her lips were slightly apart. She looked like a woman who held a ball of fire between her finger-tips, and toyed with it caressingly.

"Shall we walk along the cliffs?"

She hesitated a moment. "No; let us go into the forest."

As they entered they were greeted by a rush of cool, perfumed air, the scent of wild lilac and lily, the strong, bracing odour of redwood and pine. For a hundred yards or more there was little brush; the great trees stood far apart; but as they left the plateau and ascended a narrow trail, the young redwoods and ferns and lilacs grew thick. It was a hard pull and they said little. He helped her up the almost perpendicular

ascent, over fallen trees and rocks, and huge roots springing across the path like pythons, and wondered if they were penetrating wilds hitherto sacred to the red man. Presently the low roar of water greeted them, and pushing their way through a small grove of ferns they came upon the high bank of a broad creek. Beyond and around rose the dark, rigid forest, but into the opening the stars flung plentiful light. They revealed the clear, rapid rush of water over huge stones and logs that looked like living things, great bunches of maiden-hair springing from dripping boulders, the dark mysterious perspective of the creek.

Clive did not wonder if he would lose his head. He had no intention of keeping it.

"Sit down," she said, arranging herself on a fallen pine and leaning against a redwood. Clive made himself as comfortable as he could, and she gave him permission to light his pipe.

The lace mantilla, in spite of brush and briar, still clung to her head and shoulders. She looked very lovely and womanly.

"Why did you bring me here?" he asked. "You told me the other night that you would never trust yourself alone with me. This is equivalent to saying that you want me to make love to you. I am quite ready."

"How brutally abrupt you are. I don't want you to make love to me. I meant to tell you before we started that I did not expect it. Most women do, I know, and it must be such a relief to a man to be let off occasionally." She opened and closed her large fan,

with a graceful motion of the wrist, and then turned and looked straight at him. "I have never walked alone with a man in this forest before," she said; "neither at night nor in the daytime. It would have been spoiled for me if I had."

He pulled at his pipe. "You are a very brave woman. If what you say is true, what is your reason for bringing me here?"

"I felt a desire to do so, and I always obey my whims."

"You know that my vanity is touched to the quick. But will you tell me why you are doing all you can to turn my head, if you don't want me to make love to you?"

"I do want you to."

Clive laid down his pipe.

"No! It would be a pity to let it go out, and it might set my forest on fire. Do let me finish. Women are not like men. A man is fascinated by a woman, and his one impulse is to get at her, and without loss of time; a woman may have the same impulse, but the dislike of being won too quickly, the desire to be sure of herself, above all, the wish to make the man more serious—all these things hold her back. So I don't want you to make love to me to-night."

"Which means that I may later?"

"I don't know. That will depend on a good many things, one of which is whether I break my engagement with Schuyler Van Rhuys or not. I have some slight sense of honour."

Clive coloured hotly, and for the moment his ardour left him.

"Are you thinking of breaking it off?"

"Somewhat."

"Is it true that you have been engaged fifteen times?"

"No; only eight. I have not yet discovered that there are fifteen interesting men in the world. I have only met nine."

"You can flatter charmingly. But you say you have a sense of honour. What would you think of a man who deceived and jilted eight girls?"

"It is quite different with a man; women are so helpless. But when a woman has the reputation of being fickle, men know what to expect and propose with their eyes open. As a matter of fact, there is not an atom of the flirt in me; of coquetry, perhaps, for I have an irrepressible desire to please the man who has pleased me. To most men I am clay. I am doing all I can to fascinate you, and I shall continue to do so. I engaged myself to each of those eight men, honestly believing that I could love him—that I had found a companion. If I ever suffered the delusion that anyone of them was my *grande passion*, the delusion was brief. Still, I gave up all idea of that some years ago. With each of those men I set myself honestly to work to get into sympathy, and to love him. Of course, you will understand that I had been more or less fascinated in each case. If a man has not magnetism for me, he might have every other quality given to mortal, and he would not attract my passing interest. Well, I could not find anything in any one of them to get hold of. One cannot love a clever mind, nor personal magnetism, nor a charming trick of manner, nor a kind heart; nor

all. There is something else. One hates to be sentimental, but I suppose what those men have lacked is soul. Our men don't seem to have time for that. It isn't in the make-up yet of this country. Perhaps I haven't it; but, at all events, I have a mental conception of it, and know that it is what I want."

Clive puffed at his pipe for a moment.

"Are you talking pretty nonsense," he asked, "or do you mean that?"

She turned her head away angrily.

"You are just like other men," she said. "I have always been laughed or stared at by every man I have ever had the courage to broach the subject to. I was a fool to speak to you. It is two or three years since I let myself go like this."

"I am not laughing. It is a very serious subject: the most serious in life. Girls and men and minor poets are always prating of it, but it is a good subject to keep quiet about until you understand it."

"Don't you think I understand it?"

"I think you will some time—yes, certainly. And you had better not marry Mr. Van Rhuys."

"We are so new," she said, leaning her elbows on her knees, her chin on her clasped hands. "It is as if the Almighty had flung a lot of brilliant particles together, which cohered symmetrically, and so quickly that the spiritual essence of the universe had no time to crawl inside. I stayed here last winter by myself trying to solve the problem of life, but I only addled my brain. I read and read and read, and thought and thought and thought, and in the end I felt sadder, but not wiser."

"You can't find it alone."

She flushed, and he saw her eyes deepen.

"Then Schuyler Van Rhuys turned up, and I concluded that the best thing I could do was to go to New York and cut a dash in the smart set. And he is such a good fellow. He would fight superbly if there were a war; he would carry me safely out of a mob; he would always be kind, and in a manner companionable, for he is well up on affairs and current art and literature. I should like you to know him, for he is one of the best types of American you will ever meet. But—there is nothing else. And I am the stronger of the two. There is nothing as solitary as that."

"Don't marry him. You have no excuse—at your age and with your brain. Wait until you find the right man, even if it is a million years hence."

"Oh, I've heard that——" She paused abruptly. "It isn't like you to talk exaggerated nonsense. What did you mean by that last?"

"What I said."

Her lip curled. "You don't mean to say that you believe in a life after this—you!"

"Why not?"

"Well, do explain."

"I don't see why any belief of mine should interest you."

"But it does. Tell me!"

"This is not my hour for lecturing. I'd much rather talk about you."

"Oh, please don't be unhumanly modest. Go on; you've roused my curiosity now, and I will know what you think."

"Very well. Not being an unreasoning oyster, I believe in a future state. Not in the old-fashioned business, of course; but if a man has ever thought, and if he has had two or three generations of thinking ancestors behind him, he hardly believes that the scheme of creation is so purposeless as to turn people of progressive development loose on one unsatisfactory plane, only." Clive spoke rapidly when he spoke at length, but paused abruptly every now and again, then resumed without impulsions. "What would be the object? What meaning? Everything else in the scheme of creation has a meaning, leads to something definite. . . . That is the significance of the lack of soul you search for in a race of men that have not yet had time to develop it—who are yet surely progressing toward such a consummation. . . . On this earth it takes generations of leisure, of art, of literature, of science, but mainly of individual thinking, to develop the subtle combination which puts man in relation with the divine principle in the universe. The pre-eminent development of England over all other nations is as indisputable as it is natural. What would be the object of such mental and spiritual development if this incomplete life of ours were all? We go on afterward, of course; ascending by slow and laborious evolution, from plane to plane."

"And about the other thing? You believe that in one existence or another you meet the person who satisfies you in all things—your other part?"

"Perhaps two in a century meet in this existence. But most of us don't—for centuries. Perhaps millions of centuries. Time is nothing. Your man may not be

born here for several centuries—but you will find him some time. And when you do, you and he will become biunial—one in a sense that I believe passes all understanding here—except, perhaps, that of the one or two fortunate ones of each century or so. . . . The ancients had some such idea when they took Eve out of Adam.”

Helena rose and went to the edge of the creek. She stood there without speaking for ten minutes, kicking stones down into the water. Then she turned about.

“I have always looked upon that sort of thing as poetical rot,” she said; “beneath the consideration of anyone of the higher order of intelligence; probably because in this country, particularly in this State, everything occult, except religion, and sometimes that, is enveloped fifteen times over in vulgar and mercenary fraud. Even well-written treatises on such subjects have never interested me—my American intolerance of anything which cannot be demonstrated, I suppose. But if a man like you believes, it makes one think.”

She came and sat close beside him on the log, her gown brushing his feet.

“It is true——” she began.

“This is hardly fair, you know,” said Clive.

“What?”

“You know as well as I do. If I am not to make love to you—and in a way you have placed me on my honour—go and sit at the other end of the log.”

“Pshaw! After what you have just said, you should be above such things.”

“I am not a spirit yet, please remember. And I am

not by any means so highly developed as I ought to be. If you don't go away I shall take hold of you."

• Helena went back to her former position.

"The Delilah becomes you," he pursued, "until one realises that it is not you at all. You look the most womanly of women now that you have forgotten you brought me here to make a fool of me——"

"I did not! Indeed, I did not. I brought you here because I wanted to talk to you in this forest, and because the moment I saw you I recognised something in you that I have found in no other man."

"You take great risks, Miss Belmont; I should seize and kiss you after that remark, and you know it. Tomorrow you will think me an ass because I did not, and I am."

"I want to talk some more about that other thing. I thought, as I stood by the creek, of our literature. Has it occurred to you that no American author has ever written a genuine all-round love scene? They are either thin or sensual, almost invariably the former. The soul and passion of the older races they have never developed. If a woman writer breaks out wildly sometimes, she merely voices the lack we all feel in this section of the world—in life as well as in literature. That explains why I have tried to care for eight clever and interesting men and turned away chilled."

"You must love an Englishman," said Clive, smiling. "If you notice, a good many American women do. An Englishwoman never marries an American. It goes to prove what I said a little while ago: leisure is needed

for development; consequently the women of America have developed far more rapidly than the men."

"Don't imagine for a moment that I am disparaging my own country," said Helena hurriedly; "I am the best American in the world—I wouldn't be anything else; and I like and admire our men for their cleverness and pluck and wonderful go-aheadness. But I will confide to you something that I have never told a living soul—I have such a contempt for the Anglomaniac that I have a horror of being taken for one. It is this: something English in me has survived through eight generations. I was brought up in a library of English literature; perhaps that fostered it. As long as I merely read and studied I lived in imagination among English scenes and people—the people of your history and those created by your authors and poets. Something in me responded to every line that I read; I felt at home; singularly enough much more so than when I finally visited England. Until a few years ago I could not force myself to read American literature—with the sole exception of Bret Harte. It is so cold, so slight, so forbidding. It is the piano of letters. Now, of course, I appreciate the mentality in it and the delicate art, the light rapid sketches of passing phases. And it seems to me that before we produce a Shakspeare or Byron we shall have to relapse into barbarism, and emerge and develop by slow and sure stages to the condition of England when she evolved her great men. We have gone ahead too fast to ever become great from our present beginnings; we are all brilliant shallows and no depths."

"You disprove a good deal that you say."

Helena bent forward, pressing her chin hard into the palm of her hand. She had forgotten that she was a beautiful woman, but even so she was graceful.

"If we Californians have a stronger fibre and richer blood in us than other Americans," she replied, "it is because we are cruder, savager, closer to nature. I do things that no Eastern girl in the same social position would even think of doing, much less dare; but, on the other hand, I have a better chance of getting what I want out of life, for I go straight for it, undeterred by any traditions or scruples. And I have more to give."

She paused and Clive filled and lit another pipeful of tobacco.

"You take great satisfaction out of that pipe," she said pettishly.

"It is my only safeguard."

She laughed and he could see her flush.

"I suppose that English something in me, which has survived, was what sprang so instantly to you—recognition."

"You have been in England, and you have met many Englishmen."

"I have liked some of them tremendously, although I never would admit it, and always bullyragged them; that mixture of subtlety and brutality is very attractive. But it was not the same—not by any means."

"You force me to repeat that you take very great risks."

"No, no," she said plaintively. "How could I? I am not what you imagined me. But I must stay here and talk to you."

They talked until the night turned grey, drifting no more toward personalities. Then Clive looked at his watch.

"Do you know what time it is?"

"I do not in the least care."

"It is three o'clock. And I can see that you are tired. Come!"

She rose and he jerked her shawl across her chest and threw one end over her shoulder. "What a silly child you are to come out with that bare neck. Aren't you chilled?"

She smiled up at him as gratefully as if unused to the tender care of man.

They went down the mountain without further conversation; it was very dark and steep; a mis-step might have sent one or both headlong.

The house was without lights; even the lanterns on the corridors had burned out. As they entered the court a man rose from a long chair, yawning and stretching himself. It was Charley Rollins.

"My God, Helena!" he exclaimed, "this is going too far. You know that all of us who know you swear by you, but you can't do this sort of thing with such women as Mrs. Volney and Harriet Lord in the house. Sitting up all night under a tree in full view of all Del Monte is one thing, but the middle of a forest, where you have never taken a man even in the daytime before—for heaven's sake, my dear child, have a care."

He ended rather feebly, for Helena had brought down her foot and thrown back her head with flashing eyes. "I shall do exactly what I choose to do," she cried. "And I hope Amy Volney and Harriet Lord have

their heads out of their doors this minute. What business is it of yours, I should like to know? How dare you take me to task? Take Mr. Clive over to the dining-room, and give him some brandy, and then go home; or stay all night if you choose; there are two empty rooms at the corner. Good-night, Mr. Clive." And without taking further notice of Rollins she crossed over to the opposite corridor and disappeared.

CHAPTER VII.

CLIVE and Rollins exchanged few words on the drive home. Miss Belmont's name was not mentioned. Clive's feelings were mixed. He candidly admitted that his vanity was profoundly at peace with itself, and that Helena Belmont was the most interesting woman he had ever met. Nevertheless, his conscience chattered at his vanity like an angry monkey at a peacock.

"I feel exactly like a delinquent husband," he thought. "Premonitory, I suppose. I have an absurdly married feeling; the result of a long engagement, probably, and a lifelong acquaintance. . . . I wonder if a man ever bothers if the woman is not likely to find him out; I can't say it has ever worried me much before. I suppose it's on the principle that what a woman doesn't know won't hurt her."

Then he wondered if he would have sat up all night with another woman had he been engaged to Helena Belmont.

He made his confession three days later, when Mary was fully recovered.

She smiled a little sadly, the smile which seems to belong to the lips of such women, fashioned to be good wives and mothers, and nothing more. She put up her hand and touched his hair shyly; she seldom caressed him.

"She is always sitting up all night with someone or

other. It seems to be a fad of hers. And you know I trust you absolutely." (He had the grace to blush.) "But, I think, if you don't mind, that I'll announce the engagement."

"Why, of course I don't mind," he said, taken aback. "It was your idea to keep it quiet, not mine."

"Yes; but I think I'd like her to know."

As Clive left the cottage he met Rollins.

"I have something to tell you, old chap," he said awkwardly. "I want you to congratulate me. I am engaged to Miss Gordon."

"The devil you are!" exclaimed Rollins, slapping him vigorously on the back. "I do congratulate you, old fellow; she's a jewel of a girl. Going to marry here?"

"Yes, in San Francisco."

"The club will give you a send-off the night before. You won't look as handsome on your wedding-morn as you otherwise might, and you'll have a dark brown taste in your mouth, but in a long period of domestic bliss you'll have a great joy to look back upon."

They walked down to the camp together, then Rollins left abruptly and returning to Yorba went to the telephone office.

CHAPTER VIII.

HELENA BELMONT saw little of her company for two days. She spent part of the time in the forest, the rest in her boudoir, a long room on the east side of the house opening into her bedroom at one end and into a small library at the other. The bedroom was a pretty thing of pale pink and green, and white lace. The library, lined from floor to ceiling with books, many several generations old, had only a rug on the bare floor, a table and several upright chairs. The walls of the boudoir were panelled with the beautiful delicately-veined redwood the forest trees conceal under their forbidding bark. The ceiling was arched and heavily beamed. The curtains of doors and windows, the deep chairs and couches, the rugs on the dark floor, were of Smyrna stuffs whose only tangible colour was a red that was almost black. A redwood mantel was built to the ceiling; a large table of the same wood, heavily carved, was covered with books and costly trifles. The deep window seats were also upholstered. The Castilian roses nodded against the pane, but Helena could look above the garden wall into the forest on the mountain.

And here Helena sat for hours. She was profoundly stirred and touching lightly the keys of something akin to happiness. Several times before in her life she had felt what she believed to be the quickening

of love; but it had died in its swaddling clothes, and had been a vagary of the fancy to this. Her brain and her woman's instinct told her unerringly that she had found the man. Every part of her went out to him. A faint sweet something tipped her pulses. It is possible that passion was regnant at this time; that she was possessed by the savage primitive desire of the first woman for the first man; so far she had come in contact with little beyond the man's powerful personality and responsive magnetism. Nevertheless there had been spiritual recognition, blind and groping as it may have been; certain torpid instincts stirred, and she divined vaguely what a woman might be to her husband. She had known many married women more or less intimately, been the confidante of more than one liaison; and with intuition fostered by such knowledge and her own strong brain, she rejoiced that she had met him in time, divining something of the bitter sadness which companions a woman, who, meeting a man too late, must be one thing to him, instead of twenty: his wife would still have the better part of his life, his higher nature, his duty, the supreme happiness of making his home.

She dreamed dreams of her future with Clive: the love and the art by which she would hold him, the companionship. She forgot Mary Gordon's existence. Had she remembered, she would have imperiously dismissed the very thought of her. She had obtained what she wanted all her life, and recognised no obstacles.

She went up to the log by the creek and touched caressingly the tree against which he had leaned, gathered some of the ashes from his pipe and held them in the hollow of her hand. She smiled as she

did so, and wondered that clever women and silly women should be so little dissimilar when in love.

It was on the morning of the third day that the Chinese butler tapped at her door, and said—

“Mr. Lollins wantee you at telephone, missee.”

“Oh, tell somebody elser to answer him. I am tired of the very sound of that telephone. Someone is at it all day. I’ve a great mind to have it taken out.”

“Allight, missee.”

A few moments later he returned.

“Mr. Lollins slay he got something velly important tellee missee.”

Helena went rapidly to the little room by the front door sacred to the telephone. The fear shook her that something had happened to Clive.

She sat down by the table and rang the bell.

“Halloo!” she said faintly.

“Halloo, Helena! is that you?” came Rollins’ hearty, reassuring voice.

“Yes. What do you want? I wish you wouldn’t bother me.”

“Awfully sorry; but I’ve a piece of news for you—a corker.”

“Well.”

“It’s about your Englishman.”

“My Englishman? What Englishman? What nonsense are you talking?”

“Oh, come off. I’ve terrible news for you. I’ve just congratulated him. He’s mortgaged.”

“I wish you would not talk slang over the telephone. I suppose you mean he’s engaged to Mary Gordon.”

“That’s the hard cold fact,”

"Well, please congratulate them for me. I'll give them a dinner. I'll write a note to-day——"

"You'll see him to-night. I hope you haven't forgotten that you are all to dine with us."

"I had forgotten it, but we'll be there."

"Great Scott, Helena! have you also forgotten that this is our last night, and that you asked six of us to spend a week with you? Are those boys still there?"

"They are; but I'll send them home this minute. I'm awfully sorry I forgot it, but everything will be ready for you. I'll send a waggon over for your traps this afternoon, and the *char-à-banc* will bring you back to-night. Now, clear out, I have a great deal to attend to."

Helena replaced the trumpet carefully in its bracket, then leaned her elbows on the table and laughed. The one sensation of which she was definitely conscious for the moment was genuine amusement. She recalled her dreams, her pictured life with Clive, and felt a fool; but she had always been able to laugh at herself, and she did so now. In a little while she went into the corridors, where the guests were dawdling after their morning drive.

"*Mes enfants*," she said, blowing a kiss from the tips of her fingers to each of the young men in turn, "go straightway and pack up. You are to go home on the 4.10. I asked, a week ago, six of the club men to come here to-night, and you must vacate. And, what do you think? My Englishman is engaged to Mary Gordon."

She ruffled her hair with a tragic little gesture, threw up her hands and disappeared.

It was not long before the humour died out of her.

In its wake came the profoundest depression she had ever known. She looked into a blank and colourless future, realising that a woman may be young until fifty if it is still her privilege to seek and wait and hope, but that when her great joy has touched and passed her, she has buried all that is best of her youth.

She could not stay in her rooms, eloquent of imaginings, but went back to her guests, and clung to them and talked of what interested them, and had never been more hospitable and charming; all the while mechanically counting the years and months and days that lay ahead of her. The depression lasted for hours, during which she wondered if the weight in her brain was crushing the light and reason out of it.

And then the devil entered into her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE girls in their gayest muslin frocks, chaperoned by the more sedate Mrs. Cartright, arrived at the camp at seven. A long table was spread under the redwoods near the bank of the little river, in whose falls bottles lay cooling. Clive was the only other guest. Mary Gordon had been asked; but although she had accepted with philosophy much that was Californian, the informalities of the Bohemian Club were more than she could stand. Clive had been begged to go alone and to stay as late as he liked.

Helena wore a pink muslin frock, her hair in a loose braid. Her eyes were dancing. She looked like a naughty child, and chattered clever nonsense, apparently in the highest of spirits.

An impromptu band played softly out of sight; one could hear the splashing of the river and the faint music of the redwoods. Chinese lanterns, suspended in a row over the table, and from the young redwoods, gave abundant light. It was a very informal dinner. The men wore flannel shirts, smoked when it pleased them, and assumed any attitude conducive to comfort. Clive tipped back his chair against a tree, and felt that it was his duty to rejoice that Mary was not present. Every man waited on himself and on the guests of honour. Helena,

at the head of the table, had the one servant constantly at her elbow. It was her tendency to spoil the men she liked, and she encouraged her Bohemians in all their transgressions; which was one of the many reasons why they liked her better than any woman in California.

A course not pleasing her taste, she called for her guitar and sang for them a rollicking song of the bull-fight. Clive leaned forward on the table and watched her: her nostrils expanded as if they had the scent of blood in them; she curled her lips under, clicking her teeth. Her eyes had not wandered to Clive since, upon entering the camp, she had prettily congratulated him.

"Helena, you alarm me," said Rollins mildly, when she finished. "I haven't seen you look as wicked as you do to-night for several years. You would give a stranger, Mr. Clive for instance, the impression that you were a cruel little demon, as you sing that song. Of course we know that only heaven in its infinite mercy lends you to us for a little.

"Oh, Mr. Clive!" said Helena in a weary tone, but with a suspicious alertness of eye; "I had such a funny experience with Mr. Clive, the other night. I think I'll have to tell it." She threw back her head and laughed infectiously: "Oh, it was so funny!"

Clive experienced an uncomfortable thrill. The others gave her immediate attention.

"Don't hesitate to tell us, Helena," said Rollins. "We will keep your confidence. And have mercy on our curiosity; that adjective is so vague."

Helena leaned forward, and clasping her hand about her chin, looked at the company with dancing eyes.

"Probably you all know," she said, "that not long

since I spent five hours in the forest alone with Mr. Clive, taking in the midnight hour. Well, you don't know that Mr. Clive had previously told me that if he ever sat up all night with me he should kiss me, and several times; so when I took him to the loneliest spot I knew, the intimation was that I expected him to do justice to his principles, wasn't it?"

"It was, Helena," said Rollins, with an attempt at facetiousness, "and I hope he did. Served you right."

"Well, he did not! And I sat not three feet away from him for five hours, and never looked better. How do you suppose I bluffed him off?"

"Oh, come, Helena!" said Rollins, who was beginning to feel sorry for Clive.

"You know," she continued, tossing her head and tapping her foot, much like a spirited race-horse, "I have always said I could do exactly as I pleased with a man, and I can. So it pleased me to play chess with an Englishman whose only idea of the game is to jump over the board. Well, first I mildly remonstrated with him; then we argued the matter, quite coolly, for he smoked his pipe, and Englishmen are usually cool, you know. My powers of persuasion were not very effective. Then I told him that I was engaged. But as he was, too, he could not see the force of my remark. Well, you'd never guess in the wide world what I did then. I gently led him off on to the subject of religion, and he preached until three o'clock, and forgot all about wanting to kiss me. Now, I call that sort of a man a duffer!" (with an affected drawl). "What do you think about it?"

There was an intense and uncomfortable silence.

Then Clive pushed back his chair abruptly. He walked straight up to Helena, lifted her from her seat, pinioned her arms, and kissed her while one could count thirty.

The men sprang to their feet. Their sympathies were with Clive, but she was their guest, and a woman; they would do whatever she commanded.

Clive dropped her into her chair, not too gently.

"Sit down, gentlemen," she said serenely; "we will now go on with the dinner."

CHAPTER X.

MR. VAN RHUYS returned the next morning. Helena and several of her guests drove over to the hotel station to meet him. The train was not due for some moments after their arrival. Helena sprang from the *char-à-banc* and ran up the hill to the Gordon cottage. Clive and Mary came out to meet her.

"I didn't want to write you a formal note of congratulation, Miss Gordon," she said, smiling charmingly. "I hoped to see you last night at the dinner. I am so sorry you were not there. It was a most interesting dinner."

"So Mr. Clive told me," said Mary innocently. "You are very kind, dear Miss Belmont."

"I want to give you a dinner. To-morrow? I must be quick. I hear my train. Do say yes."

"I am so sorry; thank you so much, but papa and I are going to San Francisco to-morrow afternoon. He has business, and my dressmaker wants me. After that we are going to pay three visits in San Mateo and Menlo Park; we hoped to get out of them, but it seems we can't, and papa thinks I'd better go."

"Oh!" said Helena. "What are you going to do with Mr. Clive?"

"That is the question. Of course he will be asked

too, as soon as they know, but he hates the thought of it. He says he will stay in San Francisco, and run down and see me occasionally, but I hate to have him there at this time of the year, with those winds and fogs. I want him to stay here and be comfortable. It is such a rest for him after that long trip."

"Miss Gordon, you are beginning badly. You will spoil him. I should like to marry an Englishman just for the pleasure of bringing him up in the way he should go. Suppose you leave him in my charge. I will take good care of him, and see that he does nothing but loaf." She turned to Clive, who was staring at her, his hands in his pockets, his lips together. "Come over and stay at Casa Norte. You know all the men, and they will love to have you."

"Oh, do, Owin," said Mary. "They are always so jolly there, and I shall feel much easier about you."

"Very well," said Clive, "I will go. Thank you."

"I'll send over for you in time for dinner. Will that be right? Oh, my train! my train! What will Mr. Van Rhuys think of me? Good-bye, Miss Gordon. *Hasta luego*, Mr. Clive."

She ran down the hill as a man came forward to meet her. He was a big well-made man with the walk and carriage, the perfect adjustment of clothes which distinguish the fashionable New Yorker. His Dutch ancestry showed vaguely in his face, which was fair and large, and roughly modelled; but the clever, pleasant eyes were American; the deep lines about them betrayed an experience of life which reclaimed the face from any tendency to the commonplace. He looked the rather

blasé man of forty, yet full of vitality and good-nature, and possessed of all the brains he would ever need.

His eyes deepened as he took Helena's hand.

"How jolly well you look," he said with the slight affectation of accent peculiar to the smart New Yorker. "I'm awfully glad to see you again, awfully."

As the *char-à-banc* drove off the girls leaned out and waved their hands to Miss Gordon and Clive, and Van Rhuys was told of the engagement.

"Good-looking chap," he said.

"Isn't he?" said Helena enthusiastically. "I sat out all night with him, just for the pleasure of looking at him."

Van Rhuys frowned and turned away. He had wished more than once that Helena Belmont, doubly fascinating as her unconventionality made her, had been brought up in New York. He had had more than one spasm of premonitory horror, but had reminded himself that none knew better than she how to be *grande dame* if she chose.

When they reached the house he went to his room to clean up, then sought Helena in her boudoir. She was leaning over the back of a chair, tipping it nervously.

"I want to say something right away," she said as he closed the door. "I want you to release me—I cannot marry you."

Van Rhuys pressed his lips together and half closed his eyes. But he merely asked, "What is the reason?"

"I am going to marry Mr. Clive."

"You are going to do what?" Van Rhuys' eyes opened very wide. He understood Helena little, and one of her enduring charms was her quality of the un-

expected. "Are you speaking of the man who is engaged to Miss Gordon?"

"Yes, that is the man. I am not joking."

"You mean that you are going to try to cut that poor girl out?"

"I mean that I shall," said Helena passionately. "He is the only man that I have ever really wanted, and I intend to have him."

"It's a damned dishonourable thing to do."

"I don't care. Honour's nothing but an arbitrary thing, anyhow. I'll have what I want. It wasn't necessary for me to tell you this, but it does me good to say it to somebody."

"And you don't care whether I am hurt or not—nor that poor girl?"

"Oh, I don't believe I do. I wish I did. I feel so wicked—but I can't. I don't care for anything else. You didn't love me very much, anyhow. You are merely in love with me."

"You never gave me the chance. I have barely kissed you. I had hoped that after awhile, after we were married, it might be different. You have fully made up your mind?"

"All the mind I've got is in it."

"Then I don't see that there's anything for me to do but go. I can't hang round here. I'll have a sudden telegram calling me to New York. Will you shake hands?"

She came forward and gave him her hand. "Have I been unfair?" she asked, smiling. "I didn't have time to write, and at least I didn't break it off by telephone, as I did with one of them."

"You have behaved with the utmost consideration," said Van Rhuys dryly. He looked at her a moment. "Suppose you fail?" he asked.

"Fail?" she said haughtily. "I never fail. There's nothing I'll stop at—nothing! nothing! I always get what I want. I was born that way."

"I know; but there is a pretty tough sort of fibre in some Englishmen, and they call it honour. Well, good luck to you. And good-bye; I shall go on the 4.10."

CHAPTER XI.

CLIVE drove over the next afternoon. He sat some distance from Helena at dinner, and afterward she and Mrs. Lent played billiards with himself and one of the other men for an hour; the rest of the evening was passed in the large living-room, where Clive listened to better amateur music than he had ever heard before. Some little time after the women had retired, a Chinese servant entered the dining-room, where the men were drinking brandy-and-soda, and said to Clive—

“Misse Hellee wantee slee you in bludoir.”

“What?” asked Clive stupidly.

“Her gracious Majesty is pleased to signify that she will give you audience in her boudoir,” said Rollins, who stood beside him.

“But I can’t go to her room at this hour. It’s one o’clock.”

“That is her affair. Besides, no one else need know. Follow the Mongolian. If you don’t it’s like her to come here and order you to go.”

The Chinaman left Clive at the door of the boudoir. The room was empty and dimly lit. The air was heavy with the scent of the roses beyond the window. Clive looked up into the forest. The aisles were too black for shadows, although the huge trunks were defined. The mysterious arbours above sang gently.

Helena came out of her bedroom presently, closing the door behind her.

Clive went to meet her. "Am I to apologise?" he asked. "I shan't mean it if I do. What you did was abominable."

"Don't scold me. I never thought I'd do such a thing. I don't know what possessed me."

"The devil, I should say. But I hope I'll never see you in that mood again. You were at your unloveliest. You came near to being vulgar."

"I was quite vulgar and you know it. Don't let us say any more about it. Sit down here in the window."

The window-seat was broad and deep and heavily cushioned. They made themselves very comfortable.

"You can light your pipe. I am glad you came—very glad."

"I ought not to be here at all. I was an ungrateful wretch in the first place not to go where I ought to be now, and a weaker one to come here."

Helena leaned her elbow on the low grating and looked up at him. There was neither childishness nor coquetry in her eyes.

"But I am glad." She paused a moment. "I have sent away Mr. Van Rhuys."

"Mr. Van Rhuys has had a happy escape—and I am not necessarily uncomplimentary to you."

"Why didn't you tell me of your engagement to Mary Gordon the other night?"

"Partly because she asked me not to, partly because I didn't think it would interest you."

"You are very modest."

"Would it have interested you?"

"It does—immensely. What an irrepressible flirt you are!"

"Do you expect me to sit up at midnight with a pretty woman, and not flirt with her? Why else did you send for me to come here?"

"You are engaged to another woman."

"You expect no man to remember his obligations when he is with you." He laid down his pipe suddenly. "Give me these two weeks," he said; "I shall never meet a woman like you again. If you will forget what the end must be, I will."

"Why is it that Englishmen are always marrying that type of woman—and always forgetting their obligations?"

"Because it is the best type of woman alive and the hope of the race. Man is both the victim of his race and of his sex. Woman is only the victim of man—which simplifies the question for her."

"Do you love Mary Gordon?"

"Yes—very much indeed."

"Shall you always love her?"

"I think so—more and more. A good woman becomes a great deal to a man. She may lack the two things that enthrall man most, passion and intellect; but she shares his burdens and his sorrows; she never fails him in poverty or in trouble; her sympathy is as ready for the small harrowings of life as for its disasters. She satisfies the domestic instinct which is in every man—symbolises home to him. She bears his children and gives him unfailing submission and help."

Helena pressed her fan against her lips. Something stabbed through her.

“A clever woman could give you all that—and more,” she said, after a moment.

“No; she might think she could in the first enthusiasm of love. But she would not, for the reason that she would exact as much in return; and a man has so little time.”

“And is that your idea of happiness?”

He hesitated a moment. “It would be hard to find a better. There are plenty of clever and attractive women a man can always meet.”

“That is not what I asked you. You answered for the race, not for yourself. Are you afraid of being disloyal to Mary Gordon? Well, these two weeks are to be mine, not hers. If you will not be frank with me how are we to know each other? And I will keep your confidences. Tell me—is that your idea of happiness?”

“No,” he said. “It is not.”

“Why did you ask her to marry you—seeing things as clearly as you do? There is not the same excuse for you as for many men.”

“Four years ago I had thought less. And propinquity is a strong factor.”

“What shall you do when you meet the one woman?”

“I don’t know. No man knows beforehand what he will do in any circumstance. Perhaps I should behave like a scoundrel and cut. Perhaps I should find strength somewhere.”

“What is the use of strength? What do all those ideals amount to, anyhow? I have often had the most exalted longings, a desire for something better and

higher, I hardly know what. And I have always asked—To what end? *Cui bono?*”

“That is because you will believe that the mystery of your nature means nothing; that the blind striving of millions of beings for spiritual things, which is formulated under the general name of religion, means nothing. The lower the plane you live on now the longer will be your climb hereafter.”

“Does Mary Gordon share your convictions?”

“I have never spoken of them to her.”

“Shall you?”

“Most likely.”

“And she will believe whatever you tell her to believe?”

“I think I can carry her with me.”

“And that will be another bond?”

“Yes.”

“You are an extraordinary man, and we do have the most remarkable midnight conversations.”

“I am ready to talk of other things. Are you going to give me these two weeks?”

“Yes.”

“Are you going to behave yourself, or are you going to treat me to another performance like that of last night?”

“Oh—never! I hope I shall never feel that way again. Papa used to encourage me when I got on my high horse, and I always let myself go. But I became ashamed of myself for being so undignified, some years ago. I can’t think why I—yes I can, of course, and you know why just as well as I do.”

“Give me your hand.”

She gave it to him, and he bent over her. She had no thought of failure, but she shrank away.

• "Wait," she said.

"For what? You have dismissed Van Rhuyt, and we have only two weeks."

"Is it necessary that I should kiss you?"

"Do you think it would be fair to me if you did not? Do you expect me to wander all day in that forest and sit up all night with you without kissing you? What do you think I am made of? I might with a woman who was intellectual and nothing more, but not with you."

She slipped away from him and stood up, drawing her hands over her eyes.

"I cannot understand myself," she said. "I have let eight men kiss me and thought little about it, but I cannot kiss you whom I would rather than any man I have ever known. Won't you go away now?"

He got up at once.

"I don't know what there is about you," he said. "I never knew another woman whom I would have obeyed for a moment in the same conditions. Good night."

CHAPTER XII.

HE did not see her alone again for two days, although he was with her constantly, and they had long talks apart. There were seven clever men at Casa Norte this time; all of the women were bright, or more, and the days and nights were very gay. They rode and drove and sailed and picnicked, and sang and played tennis and told stories, and there was much good conversation. Clive wrote a brief note daily to Mary Gordon, but gave up his thoughts recklessly to Helena Belmont. She showed to full advantage as hostess: thoughtful, suggestive, womanly, unselfish. Her mind, as revealed in their long conversations, captivated him. Her grace appealed more keenly to his senses than her beauty, which sometimes, as she talked, wholly disappeared, broken by a personality so strong and so variable as to play havoc with its harmonies.

On the third morning he met her in the pink-and-green wilderness of the rose-garden. The dew glittered on every leaf and petal, for the sun was hardly over the mountain. The guests had been ordered early to bed the night before, that they might rise early and go on a picnic in a distant part of the forest. Rollins was buttoning his shirt before an open window and singing a duet with Mrs. Tower, who had her head out of another

window. Helena wore a pink-and-white organdie frock and a large hat lined with pink. She was gathering a cluster of roses for her belt. As Clive joined her she plucked a bud and pinned it on his cheviot shirt: he wore no coat; the men only dressed for dinner.

Clive's broad shoulders were between the house and Helena. He pressed his hand suddenly over hers, flattening the bud.

"You've stuck me," she said, pouting. "These roses are full of thorns."

"I think I'd better go."

She gave him a glance of mingled alarm, anger and appeal.

"You will not go!"

She turned her hand about and clasped it over his.

"What is the use? I'm afraid I'm getting in too deep. What commonsense I have left tells me to get out while there is time."

She tightened her clasp. "But you won't go?" she said imperiously.

"No, I shall not go. If I did I shouldn't stay."

Helena threw back her head, her woman's keen delight in power over man as strong for the moment as her gladness in Clive's touch and presence.

After breakfast Miss Belmont and her guests drove for two hours through the forest, scarcely seeing the sun, then camped in a cañon by a running stream. The cañon was narrow at the bottom but widened above, and seemed to have gathered all the sunshine of the day. Its sides were a tangle of fragrant chaparral, wild roses, purple lilac, and red lily, the delicate green of

young trees, the metallic green and red of the madroño. On high were the stark redwoods.

Some of the men went frankly to sleep after luncheon. The others and several of the girls fished ardently.

"Come," said Helena to Clive, "there is a trail over there, and I want to see what is on top."

"It will be a hard pull."

"Don't you want to come? Very well, I'll go alone. Hang my hat on that tree."

She sprang lightly from stone to stone across the stream.

He followed her up the steep side of the cañon, through brush so dense that they were quickly out of sight, and through a bewildering fragrance. At the top they were in the dark forest again, and pushed along as best they could. They found themselves among the straggling outposts of an underforest of fronds. A few redwoods spread their spiked arms above it, but the sun touched many a rustling fan. The heights beyond lifted away irregularly, in steepes and galleries and higher levels, a gracious blue mist softening the austerity of the crowding trees. A creek roared softly above the low rhythmic murmur of the forest. Even these slight sounds seemed to intrude on the great primeval silence.

"What is it?" asked Helena; "the peculiar influence of these redwood forests? I have been in other forests in many parts of the world, and I have never known anything like this. It lifts one up, makes one feel capable of anything, and yet gives one a terrible longing and loneliness—when one is alone."

"It is partly spiritual, partly sensual. The forest seems to hold in essence the two principles of the uni-

verse. Do you want to go in among these ferns? They are pretty thick, but I can hold them back for you."

"Yes. I want to see what is in there."

They pushed in among the fronds, which grew taller as they penetrated. Soon Clive had no need to hold the leaves apart for his companion; they spread out a foot and more above their heads. The place, a young forest of slender columns, was filled with green light. Small feathery ferns nodded in a little breeze. The creek seemed to murmur above them. Clive turned and looked at Helena. Her face was glorified. He took her in his arms and kissed her. She did not shrink from him, and they clung together.

After a few moments she moved her head back and looked up at him. His eyes were not laughing.

"There is something I want to say," she said. "A woman doesn't usually say it until she is asked. I love you. I want you to know that I couldn't kiss you like that if I did not."

"I believe that you love me," he said.

"Did you guess the reason I did not kiss you the other night? I had intended to, but it suddenly came to me that you did not love me enough, that you were merely in love with me; and I could not give myself like that. I intended to wait longer than this. But I forgot." She hesitated a moment—the colour left her face. "Do you love me?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "I love you."

She went back to his arms, but even while she learned the lesson that some women learn once only, and then possessingly and finally, she realised that she

had not the courage to speak of Mary Gordon. She had intended, the moment she was sure of him, to command him to break his engagement at once; but her arrogant will found itself supple before the strong fibre of the man, and shrank from the encounter. They walked on after a time, until they came to a stone, where they sat down. She put her hands about his face. The motion was a little awkward, but she was a woman who would grow very lavish with caresses.

"Why do you look so serious?" she asked. "You looked so different a moment ago."

"The situation is serious," he said briefly. "But don't let us talk about it; we have twelve more days."

She threw her head back against his shoulder and looked up into the feathery roof. A ray of light wandered in and touched her face. "I am so happy," she said, "I don't care what to-morrow brings. I have thought and thought of being with you like this, and now I am and it is enough. I ought to be serious—I know what you are thinking of—but it doesn't matter; nothing but this matters. I never took life seriously—except in a sort of abstract mental way occasionally—until a week ago, and I doubt if I could keep it up."

"You could keep it up. You don't know yourself."

"Once I got dreadfully bored and took care of a sick poor woman who lived in a cabin near a place where I was staying. Her husband was away in the mines, and she had no one to look after her but neighbours as poor as herself. I sat up with her and worked over her as if she were my sister. I was frightfully interested, and so proud of myself. Then one morning—

I think it was the fifth—I was sitting by the window about four o'clock, looking at the view, which was beautiful—a rolling country covered with closely trimmed grape-vines, and miles and miles beyond a range of blue mountains. It was so quiet. Eternity must be like that quiet of four in the morning. And gradually as I looked, the most sickening disgust crept over me for the life I had led the past four days, an utter collapse of my philanthropy. I wanted to go away and be frivolous. I was hideously bored. I hated the sick woman, her poverty and everything serious in life. I stole away and sent back a servant to stop until I could get a trained nurse. I never went near the woman again."

He pressed her to him with passionate sympathy. "Poor child," he said, "you have lived only in the shallows. I wish you always might."

But she was too happy to heed anything but the strength of his embrace.

"You don't know yourself," he said, "not the least little bit."

"I know a lot more than you think, and I know how I can love you."

"You hardly know that. You have merely a vague far-away notion. All your woman's lore is borrowed, and you are only half awake. Your mind, your mental conception of things, has outrun everything else. If the other part ever caught up you would be a wonderful woman."

Something in his tone made her take her will between her teeth.

"You will teach me," she said imperiously, "as long as we are both alive."

"Yes, if I am a scoundrel. But don't let us talk about that now, please. I will be happy, too. Come, let us get out of this. It is damp and we will get rheumatism, which is not romantic. Let us go home and sit in your boudoir. I feel as if I should like to be surrounded by the conventionalities of life for a time. One feels too primitive in this forest."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning she awoke with a sudden pang of sympathy for Mary Gordon. Her intuitions were keener than they had ever been. She turned restlessly, then sprang out of bed and rang for her maid.

She went out into the garden and gathered a basket of roses for the breakfast-table. As she entered the court, the dew on her hair, her damp frock clinging to her bust and arms, Clive was standing by the fountain, and alone. His eyes had been dull, but the light sprang to them as he went forward to meet her. He half held out his arms. She dropped the basket into them with a little laugh.

"Come into the dining-room," she said, "and help me arrange them."

The water was ready in the silver and crystal bowls. She disposed the roses with a few practised touches, then turned and flung her arms about Clive and kissed him.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "Didn't you sleep?"

"No; not much."

"You said you would not think. Not for twelve days."

"I shall try not to."

"You must sleep after breakfast. I'll have your room darkened and all the horrid flies put out, and Faun will stand outside your door and see that no one passes."

"What a dear little wife you would make."

"Do you think I would make a good wife?" she asked anxiously. "That you could do anything with all this raw material?"

"I think you would make the most perfect wife in the world," he said.

Helena made no secret of her love for Clive. Even if she had been less sure of success, she would have gloried in doing him honour. But, although she did not doubt the issue, she had respect enough for him to scent a battle ahead, and the savage in her was ardent for the fight.

The household was profoundly interested. Helena, despite her love of power, had never been known before to deliberately woo a man from another woman. They knew that she must be mastered by a passion new to her, to ignore a girl whom she liked and respected as she did Mary Gordon. Even the women believed she would win; only Rollins doubted.

"I don't know," he said to Mrs. Lent; "he's broad-gauge, that man. He's so infatuated now that he doesn't know where he's at. But he'll wake up, and then I don't know that even Helena Belmont will be able to manage him. A man hates to go back on a girl, anyhow; he doesn't exactly know how to do it."

"Well, I wish he'd hurry and make up his mind," said Mrs. Lent, "for he looks like a funeral. He flirted with even poor little me when he first came, but I haven't seen that delightfully wicked expression in his eyes for a week."

CHAPTER XIV.

CLIVE would not sit up all night with Helena, but they spent hours of the day in the forest, and there was nothing funereal in his aspect when they were alone. One morning Helena's maid brought her a note when she came to awaken her.

"MY DEAR MISS BELMONT" (it ran),—"I am going away for a few days. I shall be back on Monday, at four.

"Yours truly,
"OWIN CLIVE."

Helena stared at the abrupt, formal missive in dismay for a moment; then laughed. She had seen men struggle in her net before. She knew that he would keep his word and return, and had perfect faith in the power of her seductive charm, no matter what good resolve he might accomplish when away.

It was a hot day, and her guests were too indolent to do anything but lie about and smoke and read. They did not want to be entertained, and she let them alone and spent the day in the rose-garden in the shade of the oaks. She rather enjoyed thinking of Clive, for variety, and anticipating his return. She concocted clever arguments and convincing appeals. She saw her-

self in the gowns she would wear when he was with her again, and was glad for the wealth that gave such potent aid to her beauty. She was very happy: the future was so exquisite that she trembled and grew breathless at the thought of it.

The next day she sat on a ledge below the crest of the cliffs, and stared at the huge restless waves of the Pacific rearing against the outlying rocks, falling with their baffled roar. There was neither peace, nor reason, nor power of anticipation in her. She was insensible of any instinct beyond an insufferable desire for his physical presence.

That night she went to bed glad with the thought that she should see him in sixteen hours, and pictured their meeting so often and variously, and struck a match to look at the clock so many times, that she slept little. The next morning she was so nervous and apprehensive that the placid conversation of her guests was intolerable, and she would not drive with them. After luncheon she went up to a favourite spot in the forest, directing one of the Chinese servants to conduct Clive to her when he returned.

As the afternoon wore on her gloom lifted and passed. She grew light-minded and humorous, almost indifferent. She took herself to task in some dismay: in the fitness of things she should be passionately serious when he arrived. "Are there really no great crises in life?" she thought. "Are we all comedians gone wrong, personified jokes?" But she was helpless; the reaction was inevitable.

Clive was late. He was always late. Helena felt no uneasiness, but sat idly, wondering how they would

meet, her mind occasionally drifting to other things. She had carried a large hat lined with white and covered with white plumes, in a box through the damaging brush, and hidden the box in a hollow redwood. The hat, pushed backward on her brilliant hair enhanced the oval colourous beauty of her face. She took it off suddenly and threw it on the ground; the attempt was too evident; all men were not consistently dense.

She heard a crackling in the brush on the other side of the creek, then the Chinaman's protesting voice.

"Can't hully when catchee pigtail allee time, Mister Clive. Me got thlee vely bad sclatches, and clothes allee same no washee."

There was no answer from Clive, but he was in view presently. The Chinaman retreated hastily, wrapping his pigtail round his neck. Helena rose and went forward. She felt suddenly resentful and haughty.

After all, it was presumption in a man to take upon himself the deciding of a question which was as vital to her as to him. She wondered if she really did love him; certainly she felt neither tenderness nor tolerance at the moment.

Clive walked slowly across the felled redwood which served as bridge between the high banks of the creek. As he approached Helena forgot herself and her moods.

"He has suffered horribly," she thought. "What am I that I did not know he must?"

And then she realised that she could not comprehend his experience of the past three days; that her mind merely grasped the fact; she had no profounder, more sympathetic understanding. She drew back, frightened and chilled.

"I am sorry to see you looking so badly," she said coldly, as they shook hands. "Perhaps we had better have it out at once."

They sat down against two redwoods facing each other.

"Very well," said Clive, "I have been a scoundrel, and nothing I can say is the least excuse. I can only state the facts. . . . The average girl who is an avowed flirt expects to be made love to, and a man finds it no task to do what a charming woman exacts of him. . . . I took you in the beginning for a spoilt beauty, a coquette, above the average as far as brain was concerned, but still suggesting little more than an unusually spirited flirtation. Of course, I was far more fascinated than I realised or I should not have come to your house, nor should I have asked you to give me these two weeks. . . . That it might mean life or death to either of us I did not realise until that day among the ferns."

The fight was on. Helena drew back her head. "Can you not explain to Mary Gordon? Surely she would release you."

"I never could explain to Mary Gordon. She would only comprehend that after four years I had thrown her over for a prettier woman whom I had known two weeks. Women like that—simple, good, loyal women—don't reason and analyse as a clever woman does. And the hurt lasts—not because the man is worth it, any more than any man is good enough for such women—but because they are what they are."

"But she was not the woman for you; therefore she would find another man."

"She would live on an isolated ranch in Southern

California for several years, then go back to England and live in her old home, among the people she has known all her life. Those women don't seek distraction. They are the slaves of an idea. If the right man did come she wouldn't know it."

"All of which means that you think it your duty to marry her."

"I mean to marry her. There is nothing else to be done. If there were no other reason, I have no right to make her ridiculous."

Helena caught her breath. For the first time she mentally appreciated the strength in the man which had captivated her woman's instincts. But she did not lose courage.

"And I am not to be considered at all? I say nothing about being made ridiculous. If I am it is my own fault, and I don't care, anyhow; that seems to me a very insignificant matter. Now that I have found you, am I to be left alone—thirty, forty years? You know that I have about equal possibilities of good and bad in me. If I married you I could become as wholly good as any mortal can. I never realised what possibilities there are in any of us as I did in the last few days before you went away. The principal reason that I love you is because I always feel that there is something in you to climb to and that you could lift me up to you. If you leave me I'll become a bad woman. Why not? It must be very interesting, and I have nothing more in life to look forward to. If I lived with you I might grow into your belief; you could carry me anywhere; but alone I cannot. Moreover, I want to live in this life. I cannot sit down and wait patiently for a

mythical and unsubstantial hereafter. I am too much of a savage, I suppose, but at all events, I can't."

"There will be no excuse for you to become a bad woman. You have too much brain and money—too many methods of distraction. You can travel and make any life you choose. The world is an interesting place; you don't know the A B C of it."

"You are cruel."

"Yes," he said. "More so than you realise just now."

"I'm not doubting that you love me. If I did, do you suppose I would argue with you? I'm not in a tender or sympathetic mood. There is too much to be said. I *must* talk it out now; we are not an ordinary pair of fools." She paused a moment and looked straight at him. "We have a more imperative duty to ourselves than to traditions. You are in the new world now, almost in a new civilisation. Smash such outworn ideals. They are nothing, nothing to human happiness."

"Such traditions as honour and faith and pity for the weaker are in the bone and blood of the older civilisation. If we tore them out there is not much we've got that's worth anything that wouldn't follow."

"I would not care—not a straw. I should love you whether you were satisfied with yourself or not, and I could make you forget."

"No; you could not."

"Oh, you are way above me," she said bitterly. "I don't mean to say that I haven't known plenty of honourable men, but they would find a way out of it—for me. You seem to be welded together so compactly that every characteristic is bound up with every other. Nothing is

acquired, separate. Probably I'd never reach you, after all. Perhaps it is as well we don't marry——"

"I wish you would not talk as if I were an infernal prig. Can't you imagine what an ass a man feels when a woman rots to him like that? I am the most ordinary person you will probably ever know, If I were not, we wouldn't be where we are to-day. Now that I have made such a mess of things I can only see one way out of it; and I don't feel a hero, I assure you."

"Have you thought of yourself at all during the last three days?"

"Of course I've thought of myself. What a question. And thinking of myself meant thinking of you."

"But you have thought more of Mary Gordon—I mean you have considered her more."

"Yes; I have."

She got up and went over and sat down on the edge of the bluff. He filled his pipe. She smiled as the smoke drifted to her. She thought that she had never seen the creek look so beautiful. The stones under the clear water shone like opaque jewels. Great bunches of feathery maidenhair clung to every boulder. The long delicate strands of the ice-grass trailed far over the water. Tiny trees sprouted from rocks in mid-stream, where moss had gathered. Red lilies and ferns grew close to the brink. The ugly brown roots of a pine clung, squirming, down the bluff.

On the mountain above the plateau a deer leaped once, crashing through the brush, tossing his white horns in terror at sight of man. A squirrel chattered high up in a redwood, where he was packing acorns for the

winter. A school of salmon swam serenely down the creek and disappeared in the dark perspective.

Helena sat there for a half-hour. Then she went back to Clive, but did not sit down. He rose also.

"I understand you a little better, I think," she said. "You won't like what I am going to say, but I shall say it, anyhow. You have so much good in you. I never thought I should love a good man, but I believe that is really the reason I love you so much. The raw material in me responds to the highly developed in you. You are capable of so much that is way beyond me. I have fine impulses, but they are shallow; lofty ideals, but in a little while they bore me. And you are consistent. Even when you do what you know to be wrong, you never vary in your ideals and faith. I am new and crude and heterogenous. It is the difference between the Old and the New."

"You have the richest possibilities of any woman I have ever known——"

"Tell me something. Is it not because Mary Gordon is the more helpless and appeals more to your chivalry?—although you love me more; although I have more beauty and brains and passion, and could make you far happier?"

"That is one reason."

"Then will the manliest and best of men continue to be captured by the best and simplest of women? It will produce a better race, I suppose. If I had been your mother you would not be half what you are. It is enough for the man to have the brain, I suppose. We are a forced growth and abnormal—but what is to become of us?"

His reserve left him then and he caught her in his arms. She clung to him desperately, and for awhile forgot that the victory was still to be won. Then she cried, and coaxed, and pleaded, and lavished endearment, and was far more difficult for the man to combat than when he had stood his ground with a brain alone.

"Come," he said finally; "can't you understand? You might help me a little. Can't you see that I want to let everything go and stay with you? Don't you think I know what I should find with you? You do know that? Well, then, you should also know that I have made up my mind to do the only decent thing a man could do."

"Well, give me a month longer. Let me have that much, at least."

"I shall go to-morrow. If I go now all these people will quickly forget me, and regard what has passed between us as one of your flirtations. But if I stayed on I should make you ridiculous, and perhaps compromise you—you are so reckless. And for other reasons the sooner I get away from here the better."

"What are the other reasons?"

"We've discussed the subject enough. Come, let us go."

"I never knew that a man could be so obstinate with a beautiful woman he loved."

"You have a woman's general knowledge of men, but you know nothing of any type you haven't encountered. I believe you could make any man love you; but certain men are greater cowards before certain inherited principles than they are before the prospect of parting from the woman they most love——"

"I said that you were the victim of traditions."

"Perhaps I am, but I am also unable to eat raw fish or human flesh. What are any of us but the logical result of traditions? Just look at this fog. Let me put your shawl round you."

Helena turned. A fine white mist was pouring out of the forest on the other side of the creek. It had passed them, and was puffing slowly onward. It lay softly on the creek, covering the bright water. It swirled about the trees and moved lightly through the dark arbours above. It fled up the mountain beyond, and the forest showed through the silver veil like grey columns with capitals and bases of frozen spray.

"Yes, we must go," said Helena, "or we shall be lost."

CHAPTER XV.

HELENA did not meet her guests at dinner that night, nor did she trouble to send word that she was ill. She rang for the Chinese butler, gave him an order, then locked her doors and sat motionless in her boudoir for hours. She pictured until her brain ached and her ears rang what her life with Clive could have been, and what his would be with Mary Gordon.

But despair was not in her as yet, for he was still under the same roof, and she had not played her last card. It was a card that she had half-consciously considered from the beginning, and during the last few days had looked full upon. To-night for the first time she realised that it was a hateful card, unworthy of her, but reminded herself that she was a woman who would, if necessary, walk straight to her purpose over cracking and spouting earth.

At twelve o'clock she sat before her dressing-table regarding herself attentively in the mirror. She wore a *négligé* of white *crêpe* and lace, which half revealed her neck and bust. Her unbound hair clung to her body like melted copper, which had just begun to stiffen into rings, and waves, and spirals. She had never looked more beautiful.

There was a knock at her door.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Allee gentlemens go to bled," announced Ah Sing cautiously.

"Very well."

She rose hurriedly, almost overturning her chair. Her hands shook. She caught sight of a terrified face in the mirror.

"This won't do!" she thought angrily. She rang. Ah Sing returned.

"Bring me a glass of champagne," she said.

"Allight."

She closed the door upon him, then opened it quickly. "Ah Sing!" she called.

The Chinaman returned.

"Light a lamp in the drawing-room and ask Mr. Clive to go there."

"Allight."

She stood leaning against the door, her hand pressed hard against her chin, her eyes staring angrily at her reflection in a long Psyche mirror.

Ah Sing tapped and handed in the champagne. She pushed it aside with a gesture of disgust.

"Take it away. Did you do as I told you?"

"Yes, missee; Mr. Clive in dlawing-loom now."

He went out, and still Helena stared at herself in the mirror with angry, terrified eyes. After all, she was but a girl with a woman's theories. What she was determined upon had seemed very easy and picturesque at long range. She had even rehearsed it mentally during the past two days; but now that she was to enact the *rôle* it appalled her. She recalled several scenes of the sort as presented by the makers of fiction (the canny

and imaginative Frenchman for the most part), but failed to find spiritual stamina in the retrospect.

"What a fool! What a fool!" she thought. "I, who have prided myself that I have a will of iron. If his first duty is to me he will stay, and two people will be happy instead of miserable. As for Mary Gordon, she will marry the curate inside of five years."

She retreated suddenly to her wardrobe, and wrapped a broad scarf about her shoulders and bust, then brought her foot down and went resolutely out into the corridor.

The fog was banked in the court. The palms looked like the dissolving eidola of themselves. The invisible fountain splashed heavily, as if oppressed.

"I needed the shawl, after all," she thought grimly. "A sneeze might be fatal."

She walked rapidly down the corridor to the drawing-room, and without giving herself an instant for vacillation, turned the knob and went in. Then she cowered against the door and would have exchanged every hope she possessed for the privilege of retreat. But Clive had seen her.

He was standing by the mantel. He looked his best, as he always did in evening dress. Even as Helena wondered if the earth were quaking beneath Casa Norte, she was conscious of his remarkable physical beauty. He had his pipe in his hand. It dropped suddenly to the mantelshelf. But he did not go forward to meet her.

"There is something I want to say," she gasped, searching wildly for inspiration. "It has occurred to me that perhaps the reason you hesitated was my money. I will give it all away—to charity or my aunt. I will

only keep a little, so as not to be a burden to you. You may think this a silly, Quixotic idea—made on the impulse of the moment—but indeed I would.”

“I am sure that you would. I had not thought of the money. I did not get that far.”

Helena pressed her hands against the door behind her. She felt an impulse to laugh hysterically. For the life of her she could not remember a detail that she had rehearsed. She felt as if on the edge of a farce-comedy. But she would not give up the game.

“I am so tired,” she said plaintively. “I have eaten nothing since I saw you, and I have thought and thought and thought until I am all worn out.”

He placed a chair at once.

“You poor little thing,” he said. “Let me go to the larder and see if I can’t find you something——”

“No; I don’t want anything.”

She sat down, holding the shawl closely about her. Clive returned to the mantel.

“My head ached so I had to take my hair down,” she said.

“I wonder what is going on in your head at the present moment.”

“Don’t you know?”

“No. Why are you such a reckless child? You could have seen me in the morning.”

“I came here to make it impossible for you to marry Mary Gordon. I can’t do it, and I feel like a fool.”

He turned away his head.

“I told you before that the *rôle* of Delilah did not suit you. And if it did, couldn’t you see that I had made up my mind? What sort of a weakling——”

"You didn't let me finish," she interrupted him, blushing furiously. "I meant—of course I meant—that I want you to leave with me for Europe to-morrow—we can marry in San Francisco—I must look like a Delilah! Why do the novelists and dramatists arrange these matters so much better than we do? Oh, what an idiot I am, anyhow!"

"Go back to your room—please do."

"You won't marry me to-morrow, then? Good heavens! that I should propose to a man!"

He made no reply.

"I don't believe you love me a bit."

"Of course you don't. A woman never gives a man credit for any decency of motive: her theory is that he follows along the line of least resistance. Well, I suppose he does."

She dropped her face into her hands. "Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she said passionately.

Clive brought his hand close above his own eyes. "Will it not help you to know that I love you unalterably?"

"Can a man remember a woman like that?"

"There is one woman in every man's life that he never forgets; and that woman, worse luck, is rarely his wife."

"It would mean everything to me. And I could be true to you. But it doesn't satisfy me." She dropped her hands and stared at him. "I want you—*you*. How am I to drag out my life? I can't believe that after to-night I shall never see you again. I can't! I can't!" She stood up and leaned against the opposite end of the mantel. "Do you know one thing that keeps on

hurting me through everything?" she asked after a few moments. "It is that you suffer more than I do, than I am capable of suffering, and that I cannot sympathise with you as I want to do. Is that the reason that you don't love me well enough to give up everything else for me—that I am not strong enough to hold you?"

"Of course it is not the reason. If you really love me—and I believe you do—you will suffer enough before you get through."

For awhile neither spoke again, nor moved. The ocean sounded as if it were under the window.

"There is another thing," she said, finally. "I may as well say it. I know that if I had succeeded to-night I should have been horribly disappointed in you. It wouldn't be you any longer. For what I love in you is your strength—a strength I don't possess. I'm glad I came to-night, although I've made myself ridiculous; I know both you and myself better. I can be true to you now; I don't think I could have been before, and I might have done reckless things. And perhaps after you have gone and the novelty and excitement have worn off, I shall understand you still better. That is what I shall live for. Promise me that you will believe that, and that spiritually I shall never be far from you, and that I am growing better instead of worse."

"I don't need to promise." His left hand was still above his eyes. Helena saw his right clench. She went toward the door.

He went forward to open it for her. As he reached out his hand for the knob she struck it down and flung her arms about him.

"I can't go like this," she said passionately. "You must kiss me once more."

He caught her to him. She saw his eyes blaze as he bent his head, and thought, as far as she was capable of thinking, that her generalities had been correct. Even in the rapture of the moment a pang shot through her. Then she found herself on the other side of the door and heard the key turn in the lock.

She remembered only that she was hungry and tired. She went to the larder, and sat on a box and ate a plate of cold chicken and bread, then went to bed and slept soundly.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEXT morning the guests of Casa Norte were assembled in the court discussing Clive's departure and waiting for the traps which would take them for their accustomed drive, when Helena, dressed in her habit, came out of her room and walked up to them.

"Mr. Clive has gone, I suppose?" she asked.

"He left a short time ago," said Miss Lord. "I am so sorry he will not return. Helena, how can you be so cruel?"

"You are a hypocrite and talking rubbish. I tried to get him away from Mary Gordon, and I lost the game, and I don't care in the least whether you know it or not. I shall not drive with you this morning. I am going for a ride by myself;" and she left the house.

"Home, heaven, and mother!" said Rollins with a gasp. "I didn't think even she would be as game as that. Well, I am sorry—sorry. Damn the whole business of life, anyhow."

Helena rode rapidly through the forest, taking a short cut by trail to the fern grove above the cañon. She came upon it after an hour's hard riding. She noted that it was almost circular in form, irregularly outlined by the redwoods. The stiff feather tops were rustling in a soft breeze and glinted with the younger shades of green. She thought that she had never seen

the sky so blue, the sun so golden. The trees were singing high above. Occasionally one branch creaked upon another, discordantly.

She tethered her horse and went in among the ferns. When they closed above her head, and the green twilight was about her, she felt gratefully that she was beyond the eye of man, hidden even from the redwoods, which, she had a fancy, were human and wise.

She sat down on the stone and cried. Tears did not come easily to her; she was not a lightly emotional woman. To-day she abandoned herself to a passion of grief which thrilled her nerves and cramped her fingers. It was a passion which accumulated depth and strength instead of dissipating itself, and it was an hour before she was exhausted. The storm brought no relief, as April showers do to most women. She felt heavy and blunt, and knew that the third stage would be the first. She was conscious of one other thing only: that she understood Clive better than she had ever done before, and that her sympathy was as strong for him as for herself.

Suddenly she sprang to her feet and faced the point of the fern-wood where she had made entrance. The tears dried under the quick rush of blood.

"Owin!" she cried. "Owin!"

She strained her head forward, then drew back slowly. There was not a sound in the forest. Her lips fell apart. "Owin!" she gasped. She shook from head to foot. He had a quick strong step. She heard it now with a sub-consciousness of which she had never been cognisant before. But it made no sound in her ears.

Then she sank back against the ferns, bending them with her weight, closing her eyes. The spiritual part within her seemed to become clearly defined. Something touched and passed it. There was a moment of promise, rather than of ecstasy, then of peace:

She opened her eyes. "Owin!" she whispered. But she was alone.

She went out of the ferns and mounted her horse, and rode rapidly homeward. As she turned the corner of Casa Norte she heard the telephone-bell ring violently. A groom met her and lifted her from the horse. She walked down the garden toward the door. Her aunt entered the office. Helena paused outside of the window to listen to the ridiculous one-sided conversation of the telephone.

"Halloo!

"Speak louder, please.

"A what?

"Oh—how dreadful!

"What? The trestle? Are you sure? How awful! How high is it?

"Three hundred feet! Great heavens! Were any lives lost?

"Everybody? Oh, impossible—but of course—three hundred feet.

"Only a few passengers—well that is something.

"The cars are on fire, you say. Oh, merciful heaven!

"Oh, I am glad. That is one blessing, at least. Of course they were killed instantly on those rocks.

"Who? What? My God! No! No! Why, he was here only this morning. It's impossible! Impossible!

"Oh!"

Mrs. Cartright staggered to her feet, her face appearing before the open window. Her jaw was fallen, her skin the colour of dough. She saw Helena.

"Oh!" she gasped. "What—what do you think has happened?"

"What?"

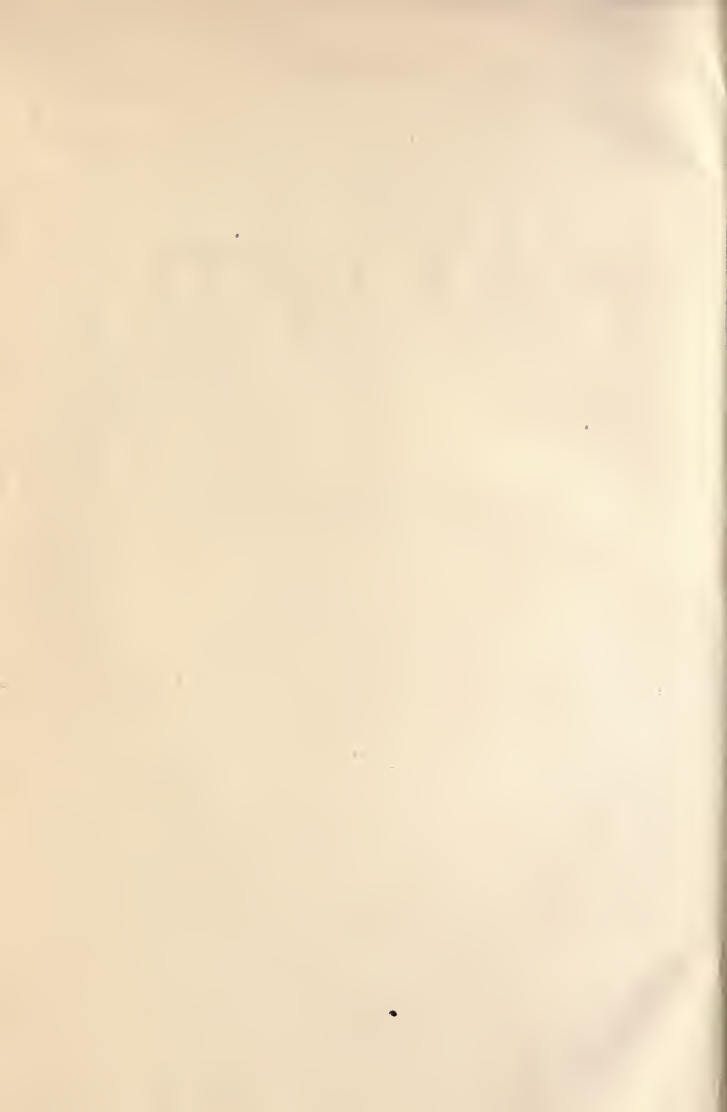
"The train went over the trestle by Jo Bagley's—three hundred feet—burnt up. And Mr. Clive—isn't it awful that I should have spoken to him not three hours ago?—was on it. Jo Bagley says he spoke to him when the train stopped. Oh, Helena Belmont, how can you look so indifferent?"

Helena turned and went back into the forest.

THE END.

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